

**Christoph Hein:**  
**The Concept and Development of the Role of the Chronicler.**

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**PhD**  
**University of Edinburgh**  
**1997**



I declare:

- a) that this thesis has been composed by me and
- b) that the work contained within it is my own.

signature

# **Christoph Hein: The Concept and Development of the Role of the Chronicler.**

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## **Abstract**

The thesis is an examination of the concept of the chronicler and the nature of the chronicle as developed by the GDR author Christoph Hein from the theoretical writing of the philosopher Walter Benjamin. It examines the role of the chronicler as portrayed in Benjamin's essay "Der Erzähler", and his theses on history "Über den Begriff der Geschichte", and the way in which this was adopted and developed by Hein as the basis of his understanding of the nature and role of the author in GDR society.

The role of the author as chronicler is fundamental to the understanding of Hein's literary production. A full and detailed analysis of the author's theoretical development of the concept of the chronicler, and its application in his works of prose fiction during his time as a writer in the GDR, has hitherto not been undertaken.

The first chapter aims to examine Hein's understanding of history and the role of the chronicler in the context of his own theoretical writing. It begins with his analysis of the nature of historical understanding and the writing of history as practised in the GDR presented in the essay "Die fünfte Grundrechenart". An examination then follows of Benjamin's concept of the chronicle and its adoption and development by Hein, based on interviews and essays by the author. It concludes with Hein's critique of progress in history through the examination of the essay "Maelzel's Chess Player goes to Hollywood. Das Verschwinden des künstlerischen Produzenten im Zeitalter der technischen Reproduzierbarkeit", in the context of Benjamin's historical theses "Über den Begriff der Geschichte".

The following chapters examine the role of the chronicler and the nature of the chronicle as they are presented in the prose fiction which Hein produced as an author in the GDR: The novella *Drachenblut*, the novel *Horns Ende*, and the "Erzählung" *Der Tangospieler*, as well as the collection of shorter prose fiction *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen*.

The main finding of this thesis is that Hein develops the concept of the chronicle from the theoretical writings of Walter Benjamin into an intellectual position as a GDR author, by which he defines not only his role as an author, but which he also uses as a model for the creation of his prose fiction. Through his literary writing, he criticises the historical understanding which prevailed in the GDR and the idea of progress in history. His works are literary contributions which aim to broaden the discussion of the problems of social life in the GDR and the position of the author in relation to the state.

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## Introduction

In an interview with the magazine *Theater der Zeit* in 1978 the author Christoph Hein, in answer to a question concerning the opportunities for the development of young authors in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), responded by saying: 'Das gegenwärtige Theater ist Schreibanlaß für Prosa.'<sup>1</sup> He criticised the unadventurous, prescriptive approach of the main theatres in the GDR in the selection of their repertoire, and the stifling effect this had on the development of talented and aspiring young dramatists. A year later, Hein's first collection of short prose fiction, *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois (Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen)* was published in the GDR.<sup>2</sup> This was followed in 1982 by the novella *Der fremde Freund (Drachenblut)*,<sup>3</sup> the novel *Horns Ende* in 1985 and the story *Der Tangospieler* in 1989. In addition to his prose fiction, two volumes of essays were also published in the GDR: *Öffentlich arbeiten* in 1987 and *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen* in 1990.

In 1982 Hein was awarded the Heinrich-Mann-Preis for literature, in 1983 the Westdeutscher Kritikerpreis and in 1989 the Lessing-Preis (GDR). Although he never ceased his work as a dramatist, it was his prose writing which initially brought him to the attention of a larger public, and which secured for him the reputation as one of the leading figures amongst the dissenting voices of artists and writers to emerge during the last decade of the GDR. His works represent a literary contribution to the discussion of the problems of social life in the GDR and the expectations which defined the nature of the role of the writer in relation to the state.

Hein rejects the argument that there exists a basic theme to his work. Nevertheless, it is evident that history, at both a concrete and a theoretical level, plays a particularly

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, 'Ein Interview', in Christoph Hein, *Öffentlich arbeiten. Essays und Gespräche* (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1987), pp. 97-107 (p. 101) (first publ. in *Theater der Zeit*, 7 (1978), pp.51-52).

<sup>2</sup> *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois* (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1979) (publ. in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) under the title *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1982) (München: dtv, 1987) (Frankfurt am Main: Sammlung Luchterhand, 1989)). All future references to the text refer to the Frankfurt/M 1989 edition.

<sup>3</sup> *Der fremde Freund* (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1982) (publ. in the FRG under the title *Drachenblut* (Frankfurt/M: Sammlung Luchterhand, 1985)). All future references to the text refer to the Frankfurt/M 1989 7th edition.

important role in all aspects of his writing. Hein regards his role, and the role of the author in general, as that of a chronicler, working within the very specific medium of literature. In an interview with the newspaper *Neues Deutschland* in which he was asked about the importance of history in his work, he replied:

Das hat mit meinem Beruf zu tun. Ich empfinde den Beruf eines Schriftstellers als den eines Berichterstatters, eines Chronisten. Ich bin ein Schreiber von Chroniken, mit literarischen Mitteln natürlich. Und ich habe darin eine ganze Reihe von Vorbildern in der deutschen Literatur, etwa Johann Peter Hebel oder Heinrich von Kleist oder Franz Kafka. Sie sind sehr genaue Chronisten gewesen, das gefällt mir an ihnen und an diesem Beruf.<sup>4</sup>

Hein's understanding of the relationship between literature and history is therefore a vital element in terms of both the composition and content of his writing as well as playing an important part in defining his role and self identity as chronicler and author. A consequence of this for much of Hein's fiction is that the historian becomes the central character, around whose moral and ethical torments and dilemmas the plot is constructed. The role of the historian in Hein's fiction bears many similarities to that of the figure of the artist in early 20th century bourgeois literature, as a symbolic embodiment of the conflicts and contradictions within a society at a given point in time. Just as the character of the artist in the bourgeois novel symbolised the struggle for identity and belonging when confronting the principles of aesthetic idealism with the dominant philosophy of an increasingly materialistic age, so the historian of Hein's fiction is caught in the dichotomy between the ethical obligations of the profession with regard to the proper recording of events in the past, and the political obligations and professional duties to the Party in the present, which in turn raises the question of the relationship between individual identity and the collective identity of the state.

The importance which Hein attaches to the self-styled role of literary chronicler owes much to his understanding of the writing and fascination with the personality of the philosopher Walter Benjamin. Benjamin's ideas with regard to the nature and writing of history, in particular his attacks on the fallacy of progress as the defining element of historical development, a view which found favour with the political philosophy of Social Democracy throughout Benjamin's lifetime, are reflected in much of Hein's

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<sup>4</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Ich bin ein Schreiber von Chroniken', in *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen. Essays und Reden* (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1990), pp. 201-207 (p. 203) (first publ. in *Neues Deutschland*, 2/3, December 1989).

writing. However, Hein's writing cannot be regarded as the simple reproduction of Benjamin's philosophy in fictional form. Rather it represents a sympathetic reappraisal of elements of his historical and political thinking viewed from the advantageous perspective of fifty years hindsight. Hein's reading of Benjamin is all the more significant in this respect insofar as it is done from within the cultural context of the GDR. His reaction to and reappraisal of Benjamin's ideas are also a response to the prevailing political and historical ideology of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED), for which Benjamin and his philosophical legacy, with its unorthodox Marxist foundations, was a problematic issue.

Critical appraisal of the influence of Benjamin's philosophy on Hein's writing has been discovered as an illuminating approach to a reading of Hein's texts. Nevertheless, there are very few detailed accounts of the author's intellectual appraisal and development of Benjamin's writing. To this point, critical analysis which has dealt with the intellectual relationship between Hein and Benjamin has concentrated on the textual illustration of elements of Hein's work which complement Benjamin's philosophy, with particular emphasis on the importance of Benjamin's theses 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte'.<sup>5</sup> This is particularly true of Bernd Fischer's 1990 monograph: *Christoph Hein. Drama und Prosa im letzten Jahrzehnt der DDR*. Ines Zekert's doctoral thesis, published in 1993 under the title *Poetologie und Prophetie: Christoph Heins Prosa und Dramatik im Kontext seiner Walter-Benjamin-Rezeption* recognises the limitations of such an approach, and attempts instead to demonstrate how Hein uses and develops Benjamin's theories to create an artistic concept which determines his own literary production. At the centre of this, argues Zekert, lies a moralism which is provocative rather than dogmatic, acting as a catalyst for reflection as opposed to a direct appeal for action. Furthermore, according to Zekert, this moralism is a considerable and characteristic feature in Hein's understanding of his role and responsibility as a writer. What Zekert neglects in her analysis of what she considers to be the moralism fundamental to Hein's understanding of this role, however, is the importance of the idea of the writer as chronicler, and the

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<sup>5</sup> 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1/2, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), pp. 693-704.

development of this concept in the process of a constructive reception of Benjamin's writing on history.

It is the aim of this thesis to pursue the development of the role of the chronicler as Hein has formulated it in his theoretical writing and practised in his prose fiction. The concept of the chronicler appears central to Hein's understanding of his position and task as a writer. He is quoted in an interview with Frauke Meyer-Gosau on the nature of his work as saying:

Ich will ja tatsächlich nicht viel mehr sein als ein Chronist. Ich sehe nicht in die Zukunft, das ist die Arbeit der Propheten, und zu denen gehöre ich nun gar nicht. Sondern meine Arbeit ist die Vorarbeit.<sup>6</sup>

The first chapter will pursue the development of the concept of the chronicler in the context of official expectations of historical writing in the GDR and its elaboration in a discussion of Benjamin's theoretical writings on the nature of history and the task of the historian. The chapter will concentrate on arguments and opinions expressed by the author in interviews and essays, in particular the essay 'Maelzel's Chess Player Goes To Hollywood. Das Verschwinden des künstlerischen Produzenten im Zeitalter der technischen Reproduzierbarkeit'<sup>7</sup> and 'Die fünfte Grundrechenart'.<sup>8</sup> The following chapters will explore the challenge which Hein's 'literary chronicles' presented to contemporary social and political life in the GDR and its relationship to the past. The thesis will concentrate on those works which were written during his life as an author in the GDR: *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen*, *Drachenblut*, *Horns Ende* and *Der Tangospieler*.

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<sup>6</sup> Christoph Hein, "Ich bin der Leser, für den ich schreibe." Ein Gespräch mit Frauke Meyer-Gosau', in *Text + Kritik 111. Christoph Hein*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (München: Verlag edition text + kritik, 1991), pp.81-91 (p. 89).

<sup>7</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Maelzel's Chess Player Goes To Hollywood. Das Verschwinden des künstlerischen Produzenten im Zeitalter der technischen Reproduzierbarkeit', in *Öffentlich arbeiten*, pp. 165-194.

<sup>8</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Die fünfte Grundrechenart', in *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp. 145-156 (first publ. in *Die Zeit*, 6 October 1989).

## Chapter 1

### The Author as Chronicler. The Development of a Theoretical Concept

In an interview with the *Berliner Zeitung* in November 1989, during the period of political revolt in the GDR which was eventually to lead to the collapse of the state, Christoph Hein was asked to clarify his position regarding the establishment of a political and institutional framework which would overcome the doubts concerning the moral credibility of the individuals involved in the legislative process. In so doing, he expressed a view of modern German history which reflects the position of most authors associated with the theme of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in GDR literature from the 1970's to the late 1980's. According to Hein, the cause of the social unrest which had gripped the GDR was the result of an historical legacy which could be traced back to the collapse of National Socialism and its military defeat by the allied armies in 1945. There was perceived to be no place for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the GDR immediately after the defeat of fascism. By its very existence, the GDR symbolised the victory over fascism and the opportunity to build a socialist society on a Marxist-Leninist ideological basis. The attempt to eradicate the legacy of National Socialism at one level through a rigorous de-nazification programme, which sought to transform the fabric of the state through economic and political reform, nevertheless failed to take to task the continuity of fascism in other aspects of social life, where it survived, concealed in the form of attitudes, customs and institutions which were incorporated directly into the new state:

Die Ursache für viele Probleme, die wir jetzt haben, liegt darin, daß 1945 als eine Stunde Null angenommen wurde. Im Westen wurde verdrängt, um einen neuen Staat zu schaffen, und bei uns wurde entgegengesetzt. Bei uns wurde eine Art Generalabsolution erteilt: Alle waren auf einmal Söhne von Thälmann, die den Sozialismus aufbauen wollten. Das war ein - möglicherweise - notwendiger Beginn, aber es wurde ganz schnell vergessen, daß dieser Beginn noch einen braunen Fleck hatte. Das wurde übersprungen, um überhaupt diesen Staat aufzubauen. Paradoxe Weise war es der Sieg der Alliierten, der ein Weiterleben faschistischen Gedankenguts ermöglichte. Die Alliierten bereiteten dem Faschismus eine militärische Niederlage, und da sie sich als Besatzungsmacht etablierten, verbot es sich, faschistische Gedanken zu äußern. Das heißt aber auch: Es wurde sich nicht mit ihnen auseinandergesetzt. Dieser riesige Konflikt wurde seinerzeit rot oder demokratisch oder wie



auch immer übertüncht. Jetzt hält die Tünche nicht mehr, und es kommen Geschichten zum Vorschein, über die wir 40 Jahre lang nie gesprochen haben.<sup>1</sup>

Hein's criticism of the absence of a genuine critical examination of the immediate past in the early years of the GDR concedes the possibility that this was a pragmatic response to the political situation at the time. However, the policies which were subsequently introduced with the aim of reinforcing the ideological foundations of the socialist state fatally neglected to take issue with the legacy of the past. In order to establish an independent, socialist German state under the auspices of the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the collapse of the Third Reich, it was necessary to transform the structure of the remaining social and economic institutions by administrative means. There did not exist amongst a largely displaced population any sense of widespread revolutionary consciousness, the majority of the survivors having collaborated with the National Socialists in one form or another, either as active supporters of Hitler's regime, as political opportunists or in most cases as uncommitted bystanders. Communist or socialist sympathisers, by contrast, had in most cases been driven into exile, imprisoned or put to death. Administrative socialism, or the revolution 'from above', could therefore be explained as predominantly a reaction to the prevailing circumstances.

A vital element in the successful transformation towards a socialist German state was the establishment in the consciousness of its citizens of the historical legitimacy of the project. The GDR was proclaimed as the ideological continuation of the progressive, anti-fascist tradition in German culture, which in turn recalled the ideological principles of the exiled *Volksfront*.<sup>2</sup> The adopted programme derived from the politics of the *Volksfront* was based on the principle of national consolidation in defence of a common cause, the origin of which could be traced back to the ideals of the anti-absolutist, bourgeois revolution, as Wolfgang Emmerich points out in *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*.<sup>3</sup> Such a policy, however, whilst tendentially seeking

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<sup>1</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Weder das Verbot noch die Genehmigung als Geschenk', in *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.178-183 (pp.179-180), (first published in *Berliner Zeitung*, 4/5 November 1989).

<sup>2</sup> The superficial unity of the exiled, German, anti-fascist opposition to the National Socialist dictatorship as it was constituted in 1935 with the joining together of all the anti-fascist opposition parties, including the rival SPD and KPD.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR: 1945-1988* (Frankfurt/M: Sammlung Luchterhand, 1989), p.11.

to unravel a thread of continuity from the past to the present, also raised questions which demanded serious attention and consideration. In particular, the idea of continuity and development of a progressive cultural tradition concealed the internecine, ideological struggle between the various factions on the political left in Germany which was to play a considerable role in undermining effective opposition to the Nazi dictatorship. Indeed, the establishment of the National Socialist dictatorship was itself strong evidence against the idea of the continuity and development of a progressive, cultural tradition.

Furthermore, the Marxist-Leninist economic theory, which was adopted by the GDR, regarded production relations and the resulting creation of social classes with conflicting economic aspirations as the dynamic force for social change. In the GDR, however, this change was brought about not by means of a proletarian revolution, but as a direct consequence of the military defeat of National Socialism. It was against such contradictions that the historical legitimacy of the GDR had to be defined and established.

Neither did the resulting Cold War confrontation which followed the division of Germany into zones of occupation allow for the introduction of a process of democratic reform through which socialism could be nurtured. The practical consequences of this confrontation meant that there was insufficient time for this process to be implemented. A socialist state had to be established by the most direct route, through physical imposition. Furthermore, as Emmerich points out, the necessary changes which had to be implemented in the post war era were devalued by the methods by which they were carried through, reflecting what Walter Ulbricht is reported to have said in May 1945: 'Es muß demokratisch aussehen, aber wir müssen alles in der Hand haben.'<sup>4</sup> In effect, as Emmerich goes on to point out, the net result of the imposed administrative revolution was not the foundation of a socialist society through the introduction of socialist nationalisation, but rather the implementation along Stalinist Soviet lines of a form of post-capitalist state nationalisation in which all aspects of social life became subject to the demands of the state:

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<sup>4</sup> Emmerich, p.11.

Bei diesem historischen Erbe (deutsche Misere), unter dieser historischen Patenschaft (die Sowjetunion unter Stalin) mußte ein 'realer Sozialismus' zustande kommen, dessen Hauptmerkmal nicht sozialistische Vergesellschaftung, sondern nachkapitalistische Verstaatlichung, oder besser noch: Verstaatung war.<sup>5</sup>

The initial function of the new state was therefore not to provide a framework for the emancipation of its citizens from capitalism and the nurturing of a socialist democracy, which in turn would provide the basis for the foundation of a socialist state, but to impose socialism upon a previously established framework, which was in effect to conceal rather than confront the legacy of the past. In the case of the GDR, the structures were not put in place for the state to release its patriarchal grip on society. What had begun as a necessary measure to fill a political void had soon become an anachronistic, self-perpetuating institution, and an obstacle to the achievement and fulfilment of its own aims.

The failure of the institutions of the state to bring about a genuine, democratic transition to a socialist state is in many ways reflected through the cultural policy introduced and controlled through the Central Committee of the SED. Indeed, the debate concerning the nature of the socialist novel, which was to have an overriding influence on literary production during the first decade of the GDR and beyond, had already begun in the 1930s. The danger posed by fascism to the German, not to say European or world literary heritage brought about a concerted attempt to define the criteria for the production of the socialist novel. This arose not only as a political response to the fascist threat, but also as a means of establishing and protecting the progressive cultural heritage which was to constitute the tradition upon which socialist literature would be based.

The dominant influence of the time was the Hungarian Georg Lukács, whose theories on realism and the novel were to play a central role in the creation of a model for literary production in the GDR. Lukács' prominence in the debate concerning the production of a socialist literature, and the influence of his theories in the creation of a particular form of German Socialist Realism in the early years of the GDR has been well outlined by Dennis Tate in *The East German Novel*.<sup>6</sup> It was Lukács' aim to take

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>6</sup> Dennis Tate, 'Lukács and the cultural heritage', in *The East German Novel. Identity, Community, Continuity* (Bath: Bath University Press, 1984), pp.1-11.



as a starting point for literary production the progressive elements of the bourgeois realist novel, and to incorporate these as the tradition from which the socialist novel should descend. He felt that this model would suit the production of a German socialist novel better than the banal, propagandist form of Soviet Socialist Realism. Despite his fall from grace in 1956 as a result of his involvement as a minister in the Nagy government, Lukács' influence, which had been supreme before this time, remained in evidence, though not as directly through the medium of the work of authors themselves.<sup>7</sup>

The cultural policy of the GDR did not remain static throughout its historical duration. In the context of literature, however, what began as a preconceived, and somewhat narrow, ideological approach to creative method and social function turned into a reactive response to political and social developments which found themselves reflected through the medium of literature. For every attempt to determine cultural policy in a proactive manner, for example through the events leading to the 'Bitterfelder Konferenz' in April 1959, or Honecker's call at the fourth plenary session of the Central Committee of the SED in 1971 for a literature 'without taboos', there were many occasions where oppressive measures were introduced, in general or against specific individuals, in response to the ever-increasing pressure for a more tolerant approach to self-expression and political debate.

As a result of the contradictions which emerged between political theory and social reality, cultural policy in the GDR developed in what can be regarded as a rather uncertain direction. This is best illustrated by the constant tendency towards reaffirmation by conservative historians and cultural critics of its cultural and historical position. In 1976, five years after Honecker's call for a general liberalisation in cultural policy, the conservative critic Hans Koch wrote on the subject of the national, cultural tradition:

Die sozialistische Nationalkultur der DDR ist *kulturhistorisch fest verwurzelt* vor allem in - den revolutionären Traditionen der deutschen Arbeiterklasse, deren geistiges Kernstück die Lehre von Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels und W.I.Lenin ist und aus deren mehr als einhundertdreißigjähriger Geschichte sie unmittelbar hervorstach; allen humanistischen und progressiven Traditionen und Werten der gesamten Geschichte des deutschen Volkes,

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<sup>7</sup> Emmerich, p.101, p.281.

die sie vollständig in sich aufnimmt und auf der erreichten geschichtlichen Stufe weiterführt [...]<sup>8</sup>

In a similar manner to early literary production, the writing of history in the GDR was initially organised in order to achieve particular aims. This was especially the case with regard to the recording of contemporary history, in this case the immediate, fascist past and the establishment of the GDR as one of two separate German states. From the beginning, emphasis was placed on the importance of the role of the German proletariat in nurturing the progressive and humanitarian influences in German cultural history, of which the foundation of a socialist state was the most recent fruit. In addition to this, Marxism-Leninism was adopted as a blueprint for the writing and explanation of history. The position of the historian in the GDR was one of servant to the state - in this respect no different to that of any other citizen - and to the ideological requirements of the Central Committee of the SED. The position of the historian in the early years of the GDR in relation to the state and the authority of the Central Committee of the SED is captured vividly in both the tone and the content of the reply of the editor for the *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* to the decrees of the Fourth Party Congress of the SED in 1954. The author thanks the Party for its help and patronage in guiding the historians with their work and providing a perspective for the analysis and writing of history:

Durch die Thesen zum 35. Jahrestag der Gründung der KPD hat die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands den Historikern eine konkrete Hilfe und Anleitung für ihre Arbeit gegeben. Jeder vorurteilsfreie Historiker muß anerkennen, daß es die deutsche Arbeiterbewegung gewesen ist, die in den letzten hundert Jahren unserem Volk immer wieder den Weg des Friedens und der Demokratie gewiesen hat.<sup>9</sup>

In 1990, the East German historian Siegfried Prokop identified four distinct phases through which historiographical research could be said to have developed.<sup>10</sup> The fourth phase of 'relative maturity', which came into effect in the early 1970s, in part due to the change in the position of the GDR in global terms as a result of increased international recognition, marks the development of a broader, less propagandistic

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<sup>8</sup> Hans Koch, *Kulturpolitik in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1976), p.13.

<sup>9</sup> 'Die Bedeutung des IV Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands für die Geschichtswissenschaft', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 3 (1954), p.344.

<sup>10</sup> Siegfried Prokop, 'Historiography of the Contemporary Period in the GDR', *GDR Monitor*, 22 (1990), 1-14.

view of history. Significant is the recognition of the difference between the ideas of heritage and tradition. Prokop claims that historical writing and research from this period onwards does not attempt to treat GDR history as in some way detached from previous German history as a result of the defeat of fascism. He writes:

[...] the balanced use of the dialectic of continuity and change causes GDR history to be viewed, with greater consistency than in earlier phases of contemporary historiography, as a part of the more than 1000 years of German history.<sup>11</sup>

The idea of heritage incorporates the total legacy of history, with all its contradictions. By contrast, tradition is that part of the historical heritage which is nurtured as progressive and worthy of admiration. Tradition is therefore openly selective by nature, whereas heritage is obliged to be all-encompassing.

In 1990, J.H. Reid also commented on the development of a more differentiated view of history in the GDR.<sup>12</sup> He draws attention to the broadening of historical horizons from the late 1970s, when the official image of Prussia was revised to consider more than merely the previously held view of the reactionary traditions of the Prussian state. In particular, he emphasises the shift in historical opinion with regard to Martin Luther. Formerly regarded as one of the great reactionaries of German history from the Marxist-Leninist perspective of the GDR, Luther was rehabilitated during the period leading to the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of his birth. The reasons for this rehabilitation are many, and have been well documented by Mark Brayne in his article 'Luther: "One of the Greatest Sons of the German People"'.<sup>13</sup> Brayne regards this widening of the cultural net to include some of the more controversial figures of the German past as a deliberate policy, aimed at an historical understanding which sought to extend beyond the legitimacy function of history which had prevailed for the first twenty years in the GDR. Again, he regards this as a recognition of the change in the political situation since the founder years, as well as being in keeping with the more liberal trends of the Honecker era. At the same time, Brayne emphasises the complex relationship between the church and the state in the GDR,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>12</sup> J. H. Reid, 'The Recent Historical Novel in the GDR', in *Literature on the Threshold: The German Novel in the 1980s*, ed. by Stuart Parkes, Roland Smith and Arthur Williams (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1990), pp.61-75 (p.63).

<sup>13</sup> *GDR Monitor*, 3 (1980), 35-43.

and the practical implications of the rehabilitation of Luther in this context. The fact that the church as an institution in the GDR had managed to survive in spite of the efforts of the state to suppress it was a testimony to its strength, and the celebration of the Luther anniversary a recognition of this strength by the state. It can therefore be regarded as a somewhat cynical attempt to bring the church on the side of the state, with obvious implications in terms of domestic policy. There was also the matter of the hard currency revenue to consider, which the special relationship between the two main Protestant churches in Germany brought to the East German state. Thus the question of whether the rehabilitation of Luther marked a genuine desire on the part of the East German state to present itself as the caretaker of all the best traditions of German culture - to a certain extent this was undoubtedly the case - or whether it represented a political compromise, remains open.

What is clear, however, is that the underlying approach to the understanding of history remained relatively constant. Whether or not Luther was regarded as part of the German historical heritage or belonging to the GDR historical tradition is in this context irrelevant. The ideological basis for historical understanding upon which his incorporation into the GDR tradition rested remained constant. Luther as a figure is presented in GDR historical writing without contradictions, either as reactionary or as progressive, not, however, as a combination of elements of both. In this context also, the ideas which Prokop puts forward as evidence of a more pluralist approach to history in the GDR from the 1970s remain questionable.

Even before the interview with the *Berliner Zeitung* in November 1989 concerning the lack of a thorough examination of the recent past during the early years of the GDR, Hein had set out his position in respect of historical writing in the GDR in the essay 'Die fünfte Grundrechenart'. In this essay he criticised what he still regarded as the dogmatic approach to the writing of history, and called for a more comprehensive documentation and analysis of GDR history in the wake of the popular demand for political reform. The essay 'Die fünfte Grundrechenart' was delivered in the form of a speech to the *Schriftstellerverband* on 14.09.1989. Publication was refused in the GDR. On 06.10.1989, however, the essay appeared in the West German newspaper *Die Zeit* with the following preface:

Ich bedaure, daß in den Zeitungen und Zeitschriften der DDR, wo dieser Text hingehört, wieder kein Platz für ihn zu finden war. Ich bedaure, daß er nun in einer westdeutschen Zeitung erscheinen muß, wo er so angebracht ist, wie das fünfte Rad am Fahrrad. Eine öffentliche Arbeit paßt jedoch in keine Schublade. Wer keinen Kopf hat, kann halt nicht aus dem Fenster schauen.<sup>14</sup>

It is perhaps ironic that the essay, which contains one of the strongest and most direct criticisms of the concept and practice of history and historical writing in the GDR by the author, should fall foul of the very same process against which it was directed, namely the falsification and censorship of facts and opinions in the name of the advancement of a specific political and historical vision. The mechanics of this operation of asserting political philosophy are described by Hein at the beginning of the essay, when he explains what he understands by the term the 'fifth basic mathematical operation':

Die fünfte Grundrechenart besteht darin, daß zuerst der Schlußstrich gezogen und das erforderliche und gewünschte Ergebnis darunter geschrieben wird. Das gibt dann einen festen Halt für die waghalsigen Operationen, die anschließend und über dem Schlußstrich erfolgen. (p.145)

The fifth basic mathematical operation becomes in effect the first, and most important lesson to be learned from the methods of a doctrinaire ideology. The purpose of any research undertaking therefore remains to prove the result, by working backwards from the desired goal in a search for the selected facts which will ultimately serve to prove the legitimacy of the theory. In the context of historical writing in the GDR, this method was of particular significance, insofar as it forced historical research to recognise its function as an important ideological weapon in the struggle to form a separate and distinct national identity and political consciousness for the GDR, in direct opposition to that of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Thus in the domain of collective consciousness as well as at an institutional level, historical writing took on a legitimising function, serving to demonstrate how, on the one hand, the creation of the GDR as an autonomous state was the logical, political consequence of the crisis in the capitalist order as explained by Marxist political and economic theory, and on the other hand how the GDR was the successor to the progressive elements in the historical legacy of German culture.

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<sup>14</sup> 'Die fünfte Grundrechenart', p.156. [Further references are given after quotations in the text]



As Hein points out, the intention of this method of historical writing was to encourage the citizens of the GDR to believe they were the victors of history. Only this particular victory, in the context of a Marxist-Leninist understanding of historical development, and in contrast to all previous victories in history as a result of which different economic and social forms were replaced, was the ultimate achievement in that it signalled the arrival of socialism and the final step in the inevitable progression towards a communist society:

In Schule und Universität, in unseren täglichen Zeitungen wurde und wird uns Geschichte nie anders vermittelt: Alles Vorhergehende war ein notwendiger und zielgerichteter Weg des historischen Weltgeistes, um zu diesem Staat und zu dieser Gesellschaft zu führen, zu uns. Wir sind, das war das Ziel der langjährigen Unterrichtung, die Sieger der Geschichte. (pp.147-148)

The notion of victors of history is an idea which Hein borrows from the theses on history by the philosopher Walter Benjamin. Benjamin's concept of history is central to the development of Hein's own historical understanding, particularly in relation to the role of the chronicler in the context of literary production. Benjamin uses the term 'Sieger' as a reference to the dominant social class, the bourgeoisie, which he considers to be the direct descendant of all prevailing authority throughout history. The recorded course of history for Benjamin is therefore in a metaphorical sense nothing more than the triumphal victory procession of the dominant social class, written to further its own political aims.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, the history of the oppressed remained unrecorded. According to Benjamin, it was the duty of the historical materialist to liberate history from the grip of this tyranny.

Hein takes up Benjamin's criticism of bourgeois capitalist historical writing and turns it against his own society, supposedly the antithesis of the former. However, Hein denies the possibility of the idea of winners and losers in history, as history itself never reaches the point in time where any concluding assessment can be made. At the same time, he criticises the absence of dialectic method in this form of historical writing which claims to be based on the principle of dialectic analysis:

Verwunderlich ist die fehlende Dialektik dieser Geschichtsschreibung, die sich überdies auf die Dialektik beruft. Geschichte nämlich kennt keinen Abschluß, sie ist ein unendlicher Prozeß [...]. Folglich kennt die Geschichte gewonnene und verlorene Schlachten, aber sie

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<sup>15</sup> See 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', pp.696-697.

kennt nicht jenen Schlußstrich, der eine abschließende Formel wie 'Sieger der Geschichte' erlaubt. (p.148)

This criticism of the lack of dialectic analysis in GDR historical writing is all the more poignant for its Marxist basis. Marx' analysis of history with its dynamic element in the dialectic principle of class antagonism, as outlined in the preface to his 'Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie',<sup>16</sup> occupies a central role in the philosophical canon of the GDR. For Hein, the principle of dialectics remains the dynamic force of historical development, however, the process is a continuous one:

Frühstens am inzwischen nicht mehr undenkbaren Weltende, also in jenem Moment, wo auf dieser Erde das menschliche Leben erlischt, kann diese Spezies von Geschichtsschreibern feststellen, wer der 'Sieger der Geschichte' ist, welcher Leiche der Triumph zukommt. (p.148)

The influence of Benjamin's particular concept of historical materialism and the role of the historian is very evident here, insofar as Hein appears to place the emphasis for historical writing on the process, the act of writing itself, as opposed to the culmination of that act, which is the goal from which GDR historical writing works backwards in an attempt to explain the past. GDR historical writing, in contrast to Benjamin's historical materialism and Hein's adaptation of the latter, was from the outset shackled to the demands of the doctrinaire ideology of the state. Marxist in name only, its purpose was not so much one of enquiry into the past, rather its function was to justify a state of affairs. As such, it was highly selective in its approach, focusing on those elements which were useful in its cause. Such a form of historical writing, as Hein points out, does not fulfil the tasks incumbent upon it:

Noch haben wir unsere eigene Geschichte, die unseres Landes und des Sozialismus und der mit uns verbundenen sozialistischen Staaten nicht ausreichend geschrieben. Und nicht ausreichend geschrieben, heißt: nicht geschrieben, das sollten Literaten wie Geschichtsschreiber wissen. Denn ein mit gewichtigen Lücken entstandenes Gebäude existiert nicht wirklich, mit dem ersten Wind wird es zusammenbrechen. (p.148)

The need for German history to be written in support of the new German state was recognised by leading historians and members of the Central Committee of the SED from the very outset. However, the resulting works and additional contributions did not endeavour to use Marxist historical analysis as a means of perspective in order to

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<sup>16</sup> Karl Marx, 'Vorwort zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie', in *Marx & Engels. Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1961), pp.336-340.

explain the past, reflecting instead the desire to present the past as a progression of events which justified a prognostic reading of Marxist economic and historical theory. Conversely, historical writing which drew attention to the failures of the past and which could therefore be regarded by the authorities as a critical comment on socialism was subject to criticism or censure, on the grounds that it would undermine the fragile foundations of the new society and draw attention away from the progress which had been achieved.

Hein also dismisses the form of historical writing which deliberately concentrates merely on bringing to light those aspects of GDR history which were hitherto overlooked because of the difficulties they presented in ideological terms. Although such historiography would produce an equally false picture of a society's history, Hein rejects the argument that it is therefore legitimate to be selective with regard to the recording of the past, in order that the 'whole truth' which society represents is not damaged:

Selbstverständlich wäre eine Geschichtsbetrachtung, die sich lediglich auf die durchaus nicht zufälligen 'weißen Flecke' unserer Geschichte richtet, mehr als nur unvollständig. Ein solches Geschichtsbild wäre gleichfalls verlogen. Aber wenn diese Warnung nur dazu benutzt wird, um die damit zugegebenen Auslassungen in unserem Geschichtsbild nicht zu korrigieren, weil sonst die Gefahr bestünde, 'die ganze Wahrheit zu verletzen', so ist das Heuchelei und demagogische Scholastik. (p.149)

This is particularly evident in relation to Soviet history and the excesses of Stalinism. Hein points out that the excesses of the enemy in history are used in this form of historical writing to conceal in many instances acts of barbarism committed in the name of one's own cause. Such a form of historical writing is nothing else but demagoguery and historical forgery:

Wenn der Kampf der Antifaschisten und Kommunisten gegen Hitler, wenn die von den Faschisten Ermordeten dazu benutzt werden, die andere Wahrheit zu verschweigen, zu vernachlässigen oder als 'gutgemeinte Unterlassung' zu kennzeichnen, wenn 'rote Ströme vom Blut der Besten' gegen die 'weißen Flecke' gesetzt werden, so ist das Demagogie und Geschichtsfälschung. (p.150)

Hein proceeds to list several examples of historical misrepresentation, manipulation and forgery, as well as presenting factual details of the extent of the purges which took place during the Stalinist dictatorship. Perhaps most significantly in relation to



GDR historical writing, Hein refers to the Hitler-Stalin pact, which GDR historians have portrayed as a pact of non-aggression,<sup>17</sup> but which from the perspective of Marxist historical materialist analysis can be seen as nothing but an example of Soviet imperialism:

Den Hitler-Stalin-Pakt - dessen geheime Zusätze bislang für antisowjetische Propaganda angesehen, aber inzwischen auch von der sowjetischen Seite bestätigt wurden - noch immer als einen Nichtangriffsvertrag zu bezeichnen, verrät eine stalinistische Sicht der Geschichte. Die bislang geheimen und lange bestrittenen Zusätze des Hitler-Stalin-Pakts lassen aus marxistischer Sicht nur eine Bewertung zu: Es ist ein Pakt, um Interessensphären und die Aufteilung und geplante Annexion fremder Staaten miteinander abzustimmen. Daß einer der beiden an diesen Pakt glaubte, der andere ihn nie einhalten wollte und dem Partner bald darauf den Krieg erklärte, ändert nichts am imperialistischen Charakter des Pakts. (p.151)

Again it is clear that historical writing in the service of the state, and the intellectual as a servant of the state, are fundamentally compromised by their subjugation to the political will of the state. As such, historical text becomes a continuation of the wilful distortion of history in order to secure both the individual's and the state's identity. In opposition to this tyranny of the state and subjugation of the intellectual, Hein introduces the figure of the chronicler and the role of the chronicle in his work as an instrument of intellectual subversion.

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In the concept of the author as chronicler, Christoph Hein creates for himself and his writing a basis which is distinct from both the conventional understanding of the historian and the writer in the GDR. His insistence on the term chronicler as a definition of his position with regard to the GDR literary establishment can be viewed as an attempt to confront, and at the same time avoid, the constraints of classification and practice associated with the GDR literary canon. By referring specifically to figures such as Kleist, Hebel and Kafka as amongst his many role models in German

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<sup>17</sup> In one notable example of this kind of historical writing, Stalin is even quoted at length, in an attempt to justify the 'pact of non-aggression'. See Günter Paulus, 'Zur Verfälschung der Geschichte des zweiten Weltkriegs in der westdeutschen Geschichtsschreibung', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 1, 3 (1953), 445-465 (p.448).

literature, Hein draws upon a tradition which is in part distinct and problematic in relation to the main body of work which was selected as constituting the progressive, cultural heritage of the GDR. In the 1950s Kafka's work was proscribed in the GDR on the grounds that it was considered formalist, and therefore anti-humanist and anti-democratic. The controversy over Kafka continued in the 1960s, when the work of the writer also became the focal point and cover for political debate, the broader context of which was seen by some commentators as evident in the political events in Czechoslovakia in 1968.<sup>18</sup> There were nevertheless attempts made by East German cultural critics at this time to include Kafka as part of the cultural heritage of the GDR, describing his work as that of a chronicler and 'critical realist'.<sup>19</sup> By the 1980s, however, the concept of the cultural heritage had been broadened to include works by the author.<sup>20</sup> Kleist is another example of an author who, though by no means as problematic a figure as Kafka in relation to the cultural heritage of the GDR, represents a departure from the classical heritage which centred on the later Goethe. The influence of Lukács in defining the classical heritage of the GDR gave rise to the prominence of Weimar Classicism and the *Entwicklungsroman* over, for example, the German Romantics. Not all of Kleist's work was adopted as part of the progressive tradition, however. *Die Hermannsschlacht* is one example of a text which the authorities considered to have characteristics which were 'ideologically problematic'.<sup>21</sup> This position was modified by the end of the 1960s, however, as J.H. Reid points out in *Writing Without Taboos*, when figures such as Kleist and Lenz, as well as the Romantic writers, became more of an influence for many GDR authors at the expense of the harmonising outlook of Goethe.<sup>22</sup> Kleist was even portrayed as one of the characters in Christa Wolf's novel *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, published in the GDR in 1979. Hein himself contributes directly to the reception of Kleist through his parody 'Der neue (glücklichere) Kohlhaas'.

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<sup>18</sup> See Horst Haase, et. al., 'Die Kafka-Konferenz in Liblice 1963', in *Die SED und das kulturelle Erbe: Orientierungen, Errungenschaften, Probleme* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1986), pp.318-324.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.320-321.

<sup>20</sup> See J. H. Reid, 'Writers, Politicians and Taboos', in *Writing Without Taboos: The New East German Literature* (New York/Oxford/Munich: Berg Publishers, 1990), pp 29-60 (p.54).

<sup>21</sup> *Die SED und das kulturelle Erbe*, p.69.

<sup>22</sup> *Writing Without Taboos*, pp.34-35; 189-194.

It is in relation to their style, however, that the major significance behind the choice of these authors as role models lies. As Hein himself points out, the appeal of the aforementioned authors is that they were all chroniclers (see Introduction, note 4). Furthermore, the work of these authors serves to demonstrate what he understands by the chronicle as a literary form, namely the impartial recording of events as they appear, without explanation or analysis, in a style which withholds sympathy or empathy for the characters or events it portrays. Johann Peter Hebel is also significant in relation to the discussion of the chronicle. His work is referred to in Walter Benjamin's essay 'Der Erzähler', when analysing the distinction between the chronicler and the historian. Benjamin's argument refers to Hebel's work as embodying the characteristics of the chronicle.<sup>23</sup>

Hein's preference for a cultural vantage point which is both within and remains elusive to the mainstream in respect to the GDR cultural tradition is also reflected in his affinity with Benjamin's historical philosophy. Benjamin's position within the Marxist canon is itself problematic, as the posthumous struggle to claim his work by the various factions within Marxism demonstrates.<sup>24</sup> The difficulty in approaching Benjamin's work is compounded by the conditions under which much of it was produced, and the financial dependencies which Benjamin suffered in exile in Paris, which in turn influenced the representation of his ideas.<sup>25</sup> However, the main focus of critical attention with regard to Hein has been placed on Benjamin's theses on history, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', which was not published during his lifetime. As Benjamin himself recognised, the theses on history appear to contradict many of the ideas which he had expressed in earlier works.<sup>26</sup> This, coupled with the ambiguities of the text which derive from the expression of ideas concerned with historical redemption through the metaphorical language of Jewish Messianism, has made the text a battleground not only for Marxist scholars but also for those who read

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<sup>23</sup> See Walter Benjamin, 'Der Erzähler', in *Gesammelte Schriften* 2/2, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), pp.438-465 (pp.450-451).

<sup>24</sup> Zekert, Ines, 'Exkurs: Grundlinien der Walter-Benjamin-Rezeption seit Ende des II. Weltkrieges', in *Poetologie und Prophetie. Christoph Heins Prosa und Dramatik im Kontext seiner Walter-Benjamin-Rezeption* (Frankfurt/M: Verlag Peter Lang, 1993), pp.15-24.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>26</sup> Benjamin expressed the view that the publication of 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte' would encourage a great deal of misinterpretation in a letter to Gretel Adorno in April 1940. See Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 1/3, pp.1226-7.

Benjamin's texts in a religious context, such as his friend Gershom Scholem. Indeed, the use of such imagery and vocabulary is provocative, contradictory even, in the context of a critique of history which claims as its basis the principles of historical materialism. However, Benjamin's theses on history represent a significant shift in perspective from an orthodox Marxist analysis of history, which can be regarded as an attempt to define a new agenda for the work of the historical materialist in the struggle to liberate the past from the reactionary influence of historicism.

Ines Zekert's analysis of Hein's approach to Benjamin's work takes as its basis the idea that Hein understands Benjamin's ideas principally in the context of an aesthetic concept, from which Hein also derives and develops his own ideas.<sup>27</sup> It is a speculative undertaking, she claims, to point to specific examples in Hein's texts which are direct references to Benjamin's theories, and a more productive approach to use Benjamin's theories as an aid in illuminating Hein's own artistic ideas. An analysis of Hein's writing which considers the intellectual relationship and correspondences between his work and that of Walter Benjamin purely in terms of aesthetic theory, however, neglects the wider significance of the role of the chronicler, which Hein developed from his reading of Benjamin's theoretical writing, but which he remoulded in the light of his experience of the actual historical situation in the GDR. Indeed, through emphasis on the figure of the chronicler, and the description of his prose works as chronicles, Hein attacks both the way in which history was written in the GDR and the ideological premises which guided and defined this form of writing, as well as confronting the prescriptive conditions placed upon literary production in terms of style and content, each enforced through censorship.

By placing emphasis on the nature of his work as that of a chronicler, Hein also recognises the interactive nature of the relationship between the writing of literature and history:

Ich empfinde den Beruf eines Schriftstellers als den eines Berichterstatters, eines Chronisten. Ich bin ein Schreiber von Chroniken, mit literarischen Mitteln natürlich.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Zekert, p.11.

<sup>28</sup> 'Ich bin ein Schreiber von Chroniken', p.203.



Hein by his own admission therefore uses the medium of literature to write his chronicles. The claim could therefore equally be made that Hein uses the medium of literature to develop a particular philosophy of history, rather than deploying a philosophy of history around which to construct an aesthetic principle.

In *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* Wolfgang Emmerich writes about the development in literature of a consciousness working against history, where history is regarded as an instrument of oppression and violence in its desire for a narrative of closure:

Literatur ist nicht nur Zeuge der Geschichte im Sinn einer strukturellen Gleichartigkeit. In Literatur entfaltet sich auch - und die DDR-Literatur als Prozeß demonstriert das in umfassender Weise - *Bewußtsein gegen die Geschichte* als Unterdrückungszusammenhang, als Abfolge von Akten der verdeckten und offenen Gewalt. Sie nimmt Geschichte nicht nur, wie gerade in der DDR verkündet wird, als unaufhaltsamen Fortschritt wahr, sondern auch als Rücknahme, Verfall der offiziell als unausweichlich hingestellten Emanzipationsbewegung, als Ineinander von Kultur und Barbarei, mit Walter Benjamin zu sprechen.<sup>29</sup>

Emmerich emphasises the dialectic nature of the relationship between literature and history, on the one hand literature as a witness to history and on the other hand as unfolding a consciousness against the kind of historical writing which is dogmatic and oppressive.

Joachim Lehmann (1991) questions whether it is indeed possible to write history through the medium of literature, and whether Hein in the self-styled and accepted figure of the chronicler does not in fact belong to a bygone age.<sup>30</sup> He asks if Hein's recourse to the chronicle is a stop gap in the face of the monopoly on historical writing of the SED historians, or whether Hein questions the validity of the idea of such a thing as history in the sense of an objective or inter-subjective truth, which could then be empirically recorded by the historian.

In his analysis of the chronicler, Benjamin claims that every consideration of a specific epic form is concerned with the relationship between the particular form and historical writing. He then puts forward the proposition that historical writing might represent

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<sup>29</sup> Emmerich, p.18.

<sup>30</sup> Joachim Lehmann, 'Christoph Hein - Chronist und "historischer Materialist"', in *Text + Kritik* 111. *Christoph Hein*, pp.44-56 (p.46).

the point of creative indifference between all forms of epic. It thus becomes the measure against which all other forms of epic are judged in accordance with the manner in which they render the past. Benjamin compares historical writing to epic forms of narrative with the analogy of white light to the other spectral colours. In the terms of this analogy, there is no form of epic which appears less ambiguous under the clear light of historical writing than the chronicle:

Jedwede Untersuchung einer bestimmten epischen Form hat es mit dem Verhältnis zu tun, in dem diese Form zur Geschichtsschreibung steht. Ja, man darf weitergehen und sich die Frage vorlegen, ob die Geschichtsschreibung nicht den Punkt schöpferischer Indifferenz zwischen allen Formen der Epik darstellt. Dann würde die geschriebene Geschichte sich zu den epischen Formen verhalten wie das weiße Licht zu den Spektralfarben. Wie dem auch sei, unter allen Formen der Epik gibt es nicht eine, deren Vorkommen in dem reinen, farblosen Licht der geschriebenen Geschichte zweifelsfreier ist als die Chronik.<sup>31</sup>

The relationship between written history and the chronicle is a close one, separated however, by one important distinction. The chronicler, in Benjamin's analysis, is representative of the oral tradition, as opposed to the written one. The chronicler is the oral history teller: 'Der Chronist ist der Geschichts-Erzähler.'<sup>32</sup> Benjamin points to the differences between the historian, who writes history, and the chronicler, who tells it. The historian is bound to explain events, and not be content with merely showing them as examples of the way of the world. The latter approach, however, describes the work of the chronicler, particularly in respect of the 'classic' chroniclers of the Middle Ages, who themselves were the forerunners of the modern historians. The chroniclers of the Middle Ages placed God's plan for the salvation of mankind as the foundation for their history telling which, as it eludes all attempts at empirical analysis, removed the burden of provable explanation from the outset. In its place appeared a depiction which was not concerned with the exact, causal linking of specific events, but rather with the way these events were laid down or embedded in the great, unascertainable course of the world:

Der Historiker ist gehalten, die Vorfälle, mit denen er es zu tun hat, auf die eine oder andere Art zu erklären; er kann sich unter keinen Umständen damit begnügen, sie als Musterstücke des Weltlaufs herzuzeigen. Genau das aber tut der Chronist, und besonders nachdrücklich tut er das in seinen klassischen Repräsentanten, den Chronisten des Mittelalters, die die Vorläufer der neueren Geschichtsschreiber waren. Indem jene ihrer Geschichtserzählung den göttlichen Heilsplan zugrunde legen, der ein unerforschlicher ist, haben sie die Last

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<sup>31</sup> 'Der Erzähler', p.451.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.451.

beweisbarer Erklärung von vornherein von sich abgewälzt. An ihre Stelle tritt die Auslegung, die es nicht mit einer genauen Verkettung von bestimmten Ereignissen, sondern mit der Art ihrer Einbettung in den großen unerforschlichen Weltlauf zu tun hat.<sup>33</sup>

Benjamin's assessment of the task of the chronicler as not being bound by the necessity to explain the course of history in a causal manner is especially significant in view of his position as put forward in his historical theses. Here Benjamin questions the idea of history as a continuum, defined by the ideology of a ruling class and supported by the fallacy of the notion of progress through history. The latter describes the position of Social Democracy in Benjamin's lifetime, a position which was later incorporated in the Marxist-Leninist based understanding of history as it prevailed in the GDR. The chronicler is allowed a much freer association with history, and whether the passage of time is viewed from a religious perspective as the history of God's saving grace, or from the perspective of development according to natural laws, is, according to Benjamin, irrelevant.

In the theses 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', Benjamin refers to the role of the chronicler only once, in the third proposition, when he ascribes to the chronicler the responsibility to ensure that all that has occurred in the past is not lost for history. However, it is only after redemption that humanity is able to fully comprehend the significance of history in all its moments:

Der Chronist, welcher die Ereignisse hererzählt, ohne große und kleine zu unterscheiden, trägt damit der Wahrheit Rechnung, daß nichts was sich jemals ereignet hat, für die Geschichte verloren zu geben ist. Freilich fällt erst der erlösten Menschheit ihre Vergangenheit vollauf zu. Das will sagen: erst der erlösten Menschheit ist ihre Vergangenheit in jedem ihrer Momente zitierbar geworden. Jeder ihrer gelebten Augenblicke wird zu einer citation à l'ordre du jour - welcher Tag eben der jüngste ist.<sup>34</sup>

The chronicler therefore in Benjamin's view is above all concerned with collecting and presenting events from the past without distinguishing between them, or even offering an interpretation of them.

In his analysis of the chronicler in 'Der Erzähler', Benjamin considers the relationship between the storyteller and the novelist, or the oral and the written tradition. The demise of storytelling follows the demise of the craftsman, who is replaced by the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp.451-452.

<sup>34</sup> 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', p.695.

machine as the demand for labour intensive products decreases, and the advent of a new form of the epic, the novel. By integrating a multitude of events into the life of an individual, and constructing their meaning from this framework in psychological terms, the novel abandons the virtues of oral storytelling and the chronicle. The appearance of the press and information in modern times represents for Benjamin an even greater danger for the future of storytelling than the novel. Information replaces storytelling by giving factual accounts of the intricacies of life, and yet information is by its very nature opposed to storytelling, insofar as the essence of information is to be found in explanations, whereas the art of storytelling is to avoid explanations. It is this element which the genuine epic author has in common with the chronicler in Benjamin's description. It is here, too, where Hein's literary approach mirrors that of Benjamin's chronicler, insofar as his texts resist the novelistic tendency towards explanation, concentrating instead on the recollection of events without apparent discrimination with regard to their significance.

Hein's approach stands in stark contrast in this respect also to the theory of the novel as advocated by Georg Lukács, upon which literary writing in the GDR was founded. Lukács begins his analysis of the realist novel in the essay 'Erzählen oder Beschreiben? (Zur Diskussion über Naturalismus und Formalismus)', from a similar position to that of Benjamin with regard to the demise of the storyteller.<sup>35</sup> He draws a distinction between the earlier and later forms of the realist novel on the basis of the position of the author vis-à-vis the society in which he/she lived. Written in 1936, the same year as Benjamin's 'Der Erzähler', Lukács' essay confronts the naturalist and formalist styles of literary production which were current in Soviet literature at the time. The essay itself remarkably takes as its basis the ideas expressed in a letter from Friedrich Engels to Margaret Harkness, to which Lukács had access. In the letter, Engels lauds the realism of Balzac, whom he considers a greater master of the genre than Zola, and the manner in which Balzac was able to depict with a critical eye the political class with which his sympathies lay:

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<sup>35</sup> Georg Lukács, 'Erzählen oder Beschreiben? (Zur Diskussion über Naturalismus und Formalismus)', in *Romantheorie: Dokumentation ihrer Geschichte in Deutschland seit 1880*, ed. by Eberhard Lämmert (Königstein/Ts.: Athenäum, 1984), pp.270-277.



That Balzac thus was compelled to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices, that he *saw* the necessity of the downfall of his favourite nobles, and described them as people deserving no better fate; and that he *saw* the real men of the future where, for the time being, they alone were to be found - that I consider one of the greatest triumphs of Realism, and one of the grandest features in old Balzac.<sup>36</sup>

Engels' position is taken up directly by Lukács, who also praises Balzac above Flaubert as a model for the production of the realist novel. In the introduction to *Balzac und der französische Realismus*, Lukács poses the question whether the bourgeois novel culminates in the work of Gide, Proust and Joyce, or reaches its peak in the work of Balzac, Stendhal and Tolstoy, with only few modern authors, Thomas Mann for example, close to being their equal.<sup>37</sup> For Lukács, the latter is clearly the case, as he sets out to demonstrate in great detail not only through the essays on Balzac, but in much of his other work of the period. Lukács' theories on realism at this time constitute one side of the debate concerning the nature of socialist art. The other major protagonist in this debate was Bertolt Brecht, himself championed by Benjamin, who regarded Brecht's 'epic' theatre as 'a model of how to change not merely the political content of art, but its very productive apparatus'.<sup>38</sup> That Lukács' argument won the day in terms of being adopted as a model for literary production in the GDR has already been mentioned. His concept of realism reveals aspects of historical understanding and literary production which are in clear contrast to those adopted by Hein. Hein's affinity with Benjamin, and in this context also with Brecht, represents a departure from the official cultural line for the production of the novel in the GDR in the 1970s, which still relied on the foundations which Lukács had laid in the 1950s.

There is a considerable difference between the position which Lukács adopts with regard to historical understanding and that of Benjamin. For Lukács, the fundamental basis for literary production is the ability to portray society in such a manner as to reveal the complicated rules of its conception and the many and varied transitions which will eventually lead to the emergence of new social forms. The idea of progress

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<sup>36</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Brief an Margaret Harkness', in *Romantheorie: Dokumentation ihrer Geschichte in Deutschland seit 1880*, pp.30-31 (p.31).

<sup>37</sup> Georg Lukács, *Balzac und der französische Realismus*, in *Probleme des Realismus III*, vol. 6, (Neuwied und Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1965), pp.431-522 (p.433).

<sup>38</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co., 1976), p.64.

through history is fundamental here, both in terms of the organic development of characters in the novel and the course which history itself takes on the way to the establishment of socialist society:

Der konkrete Weg der künstlerischen Lösung ist nur aus der Liebe zum Volk, aus dem Haß seiner Feinde, aus der unbarmherzigen Aufdeckung der Wirklichkeit und dem gleichzeitigen unerschütterlichen Glauben an den Fortschritt der Menschheit und der Nation zu gewinnen.<sup>39</sup>

At the same time, it is Lukács' aim to place the bourgeois novel of Balzac and others at the centre of the socialist literary tradition, as a model for literary production. What emerges is a critique of the bourgeois novel, which Lukács traces from its early forms through the example of authors such as Balzac, Stendhal, Dickens and Tolstoy, to a later period, marked historically by the failure of the 1848 revolution, and represented by the work of Zola and Flaubert.

In 'Erzählen oder Beschreiben?', Lukács points to the difference between the earlier and the later form of the novel as having its foundation in the nature of the author's role within society. Balzac, Stendhal, Dickens and Tolstoy were, according to Lukács' Marxist analysis of literary production, active participants in the events of their times, and used this direct experience as the motivation for their art. The realism of Balzac, especially, merits Lukács' admiration, as it had done previously with Engels. For Lukács, no one manages to convey the human picture of the development of early capitalism and its effects upon the various social classes as vividly and as accurately as Balzac. His recognition of the real nature of capitalism and the contradictory, progressive nature of its development, allows him to portray society in an honest and truthful manner, in spite of his own class sympathies:

Niemand hat jene Qualen, die der Übergang zur kapitalistischen Produktion für alle Schichten des Volkes hervorruft, jene tiefe seelische und moralische Degradierung, die diese Entwicklung in allen Schichten der Gesellschaft notwendig begleitet, so tief durchlebt wie Balzac. Doch gleichzeitig durchlebte Balzac nicht nur die gesellschaftliche Notwendigkeit dieses Umbruchs, sondern auch die geschichtliche Wahrheit seines - letzten Endes - progressiven Wesens. (p.443)

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<sup>39</sup> *Balzac und der französische Realismus*, p.444. [Further references are given after quotations in the text]

It is the honesty with which Balzac sets about the portrayal of reality which leads him to present precisely the opposite to that which he had initially intended. In his analysis of Balzac's novel *The Peasants*, Lukács reveals that the original intention to write a novel concerning the 'tragic' decline of the aristocratic farming estates and of aristocratic culture in France generally in the wake of the development of capitalism becomes in effect the tragedy of small peasant landholding:

Gerade in diesem Widerspruch zwischen Konzeption und Gestaltung, in diesem Widerspruch zwischen dem Denker, dem Politiker Balzac und dem Dichter der 'Menschlichen Komödie' liegt seine weltgeschichtliche Größe, jene Größe, die Engels in seinem Brief über Balzac grundlegend analysiert und klargelegt hat. (p.447)

All the great realist authors, according to Lukács, have one thing in common: 'die Verwurzelung in den großen Problemen ihrer Zeit und die unbarmherzige Gestaltung des wahren Wesens der Wirklichkeit'.(p.443) By contrast, Zola and Flaubert withdrew of their own choice from active participation in society, as a form of protest against the prevailing political circumstances of their time. They belonged to a different generation, whose work began after the bourgeois revolution of 1848 and the reactionary political conditions which followed. By withdrawing from active participation in contemporary events they became, according to Lukács, critical observers of capitalism:

In dieser Weigerung zum Miterleben äußert sich die Tragödie einer bedeutenden Künstlergeneration der Uebergangszeit. Denn diese Weigerung ist vor allem oppositionell bestimmt. Sie drückt den Haß, den Abscheu, die Verachtung für das politische und gesellschaftliche Regime ihrer Zeit aus. Die Menschen, die die gesellschaftliche Entwicklung dieser Zeit mitlebten, sind zu seelenlosen und verlogenen Apologeten des Kapitalismus geworden. Dazu waren Flaubert und Zola zu groß und zu ehrlich. Sie konnten deshalb als Lösung des tragischen Widerspruchs ihrer Lage nur die Isolierung wählen. Sie sind kritische *Beobachter* der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft geworden.<sup>40</sup>

Two stages in the development of capitalist society therefore produce two different approaches for the writer; one as a participant in society and one as an observer of society, and correspondingly also two different styles of art:

Mitleben oder Beobachten sind also gesellschaftlich notwendige Verhaltensweisen der Schriftsteller zweier Perioden des Kapitalismus.  
Erzählen oder Beschreiben die beiden grundlegenden Darstellungsmethoden dieser Perioden. (p.272)

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<sup>40</sup> 'Erzählen oder Beschreiben', p.271. [Further references are given after quotations in the text]

Lukács offers statements by both Goethe and Zola on the relationship between observation and creation in order to distinguish between narration and description. Narration for Lukács is akin to Goethe's method of composition, which relies on knowledge acquired through practice and observation during the normal course of life. Description, which Lukács equates with the work of Zola, begins with an idea of the subject which possesses no factual basis whatsoever. This factual basis is gradually built up through a deliberate process of research. The importance of plot is reduced. Indeed, for the realist novel of Zola, the more banal the plot, the more typical a representation of reality it conveys. Only narration is in Lukács' opinion capable of rendering 'the inner poetry of life', which is the poetry of the human being in struggle and the active conflict in the interaction of human beings. Description, by contrast, loses the sense of the poetic dimension of the epic form. It levels out the significance of its subject matter, and reduces the epic to the episodic. The conflict in human relations and the trials which are expressed through human action are reduced to the level of chance and fate.

The fundamental principles which Lukács develops in his analysis of the realist novel in 'Erzählen oder Beschreiben' form the basic tenets for his examination of the development of the historical novel. In the prologue to the first edition of *Der historische Roman*, Lukács writes:

Der prinzipielle Unterschied zwischen dem historischen Roman der Klassiker und dem der Dekadenz usw. hat seine historischen Ursachen. Und es soll in dieser Arbeit gerade gezeigt werden, wie Entstehung und Entwicklung, Aufstieg und Niedergang des historischen Romans als notwendige Folgen der großen gesellschaftlichen Umwälzungen der Neuzeit in Erscheinung treten; es soll nachgewiesen werden, daß seine verschiedenen Formprobleme künstlerische Widerspiegelungen gerade dieser gesellschaftlich-geschichtlichen Umwälzungen sind.<sup>41</sup>

The emphasis is again primarily on the revelation of the historical process through human action and activity. As was the case with Balzac, so Walter Scott, in spite of his conservative nature, demonstrates the ability to portray, and in so doing to prove the existence of historical circumstances and figures through poetic means, and to represent the interaction between the many hidden and complicated aspects of the

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<sup>41</sup> Georg Lukács, *Der historische Roman*, in *Probleme des Realismus*, pp.15-22 (p.21). [Further references are given after quotations in the text]

historical process and their influence on the characters of his novels. It is this which, in the context of the genre, makes him the originator of the historical novel:

Es kommt also für den historischen Roman darauf an, die Existenz, das Geradeso-Sein der historischen Umstände und Gestalten mit *dichterischen* Mitteln zu *beweisen*. Was man bei Scott sehr oberflächlich die »Wahrheit des Kolorits« genannt hat, ist in Wirklichkeit dieser dichterische Beweis der historischen Realität. Es ist die Gestaltung der breiten Lebensgrundlage der historischen Ereignisse in ihrer Verschlungenheit und Kompliziertheit, in ihrer vielfältigen Wechselwirkung mit den handelnden Personen. (pp.52-53)

He goes on to illustrate what he considers to be the main components of the historical novel:

Die Komposition des historischen Gesamtbildes besteht gerade darin, eine reiche, abgestufte, übergangsvolle Wechselwirkung zwischen den verschiedenen Stufen des Reagierens auf die Erschütterung der Seinsgrundlage zu gestalten, den *Zusammenhang* zwischen der lebensvollen Spontaneität der Massen und der jeweilig möglichen maximalen historischen Bewußtheit der führenden Persönlichkeiten dichterisch aufzudecken. (p.53)

In the case of Scott's successful novels, opposing and contradictory reactions to specific events are placed in the context of an objective, dialectic approach to a particular historical crisis. He does not create the 'eccentric' characters, whose psychological composition does not correspond to the historical time in which they are placed, which Lukács associates with the development of the historical novel after the events of the 1848 revolution.

Lukács proceeds to trace the development of the historical novel from the revolutions of 1848, showing how not only the change in the actual political situation, but also the prevailing understanding of historical development influenced the nature of its construction and composition. Increasingly, the concept of the contradictory nature of progress fell by the wayside, to be replaced by an understanding of history which was based in part on the premises of the Enlightenment, namely history as a linear, evolutionary development. It brings to prominence the historical understanding of Ranke, amongst others, who claim that history has no directional path, but is simply a movement through time, with no periods of differentiation in between. No period in history carries more significance than another, and history itself becomes merely an interesting collection and dissemination of facts from the past:

Wenn wir aber den wirklichen Kern der Polemik betrachten, so ist er darin zu finden, daß Ranke und die Rankeschule den Gedanken eines sich widerspruchsvoll durchsetzenden Fortschrittsprozesses der Menschheit leugnen. Nach ihrer Auffassung hat die Geschichte keine Entwicklungsrichtung, keine Höhepunkte und Niederungen: »Alle Epochen der



Geschichte sind gleich unmittelbar zu Gott.« Es gibt also zwar eine ewige Bewegung, sie hat aber keine Richtung: Die Geschichte ist eine Sammlung und Wiedergabe von interessanten Tatsachen der Vergangenheit. (p.213)

The historical novel now forsakes the principles upon which it was initially based, as described by Lukács through the example of Scott, and portrays history merely in a decorative manner, as a collection of exotic anecdotes. The arguments which Lukács puts forward in 'Erzählen oder Beschreiben' against Zola for his reliance on a descriptive technique are presented in relation to a concrete historical, and philosophical-historical context. The problem for the production of the historical novel in this period becomes the manner in which, for historical understanding, the present has become detached from the past, reducing this past in terms of its function to a device, the purpose of which is merely to entertain.

The future of the historical novel and its development in the context of a new humanism depends for Lukács in the main on the position which the writer adopts in relation to the everyday life of the people. The question for Lukács is not whether the works of the main exponents of the classical historical novel are considered to be of greater aesthetic value than those of Heinrich Mann, for example, the case is simply that the former were able to portray the everyday life of the people with a deeper, more genuine and human understanding and in a more concrete, historical manner than the most important writers of Lukács' contemporaries. In terms of the evaluation of art and literature, it is incumbent upon the Marxist critic to value a work against the manner in which it portrays historical reality. In the case of the historical novel, Lukács advocates the study of the classical historical novel for its literary merit not only in terms of the way in which it presents the everyday life of the people, but also because this *Volkstümlichkeit* contains in essence the general rules of epic literary representation.<sup>42</sup>

One of Lukács' main opponents in the debate which centred on his advocacy of the realist novel as a model for the production of socialist literature in the 1930s was Bertolt Brecht. In his essay 'Bemerkungen zu einem Aufsatz', Brecht takes issue with

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<sup>42</sup> In *Der historische Roman*, Lukács stresses the importance for literature to find its inspiration in the life of ordinary people, as was the case with the classical historical novel, which presented ordinary life in its concrete form as the basis for history and historical development.

several of Lukács' propositions in connection with the realist novel. He begins by criticising the necessity to create characters who enable the novelist to present social reality in terms of the interaction of human beings in struggle. He refers to the example of the most well known character from the work of the Czech author Hašek, the soldier Schweik, who Brecht claims is an unforgettable figure in literature, but who appears in a novel which is not constructed around the formula which Lukács advocates:

Unsere Erbverwalter dekretieren, daß ohne »kampfvolle Wechselbeziehungen der Menschen zueinander«, ohne »Erprobung der Menschen in wirklichen Handlungen«, ohne die »kampfvolle und verschlungene Wechselwirkung zwischen ihren Menschen« keine bleibenden Gestalten geschaffen werden können. Aber die »komplizierten (!) Methoden, mit denen die alten Schriftsteller ihre Handlungen in Gang gebracht haben«, wo sind sie bei Hašek, und doch ist sein Schwejk sicher eine schwer vergeßbare Gestalt.<sup>43</sup>

Neither does Brecht see much value in the enduring quality of literary figures. They are relevant only insofar as the social relationships in which they interact endure. It is therefore not possible to claim the quality of endurance for a figure in literature simply on the basis of literary technique.

In the essay 'Notizen über realistische Schreibweise', Brecht counters Lukács' claim that the realism of Balzac or Stendhal should serve as examples of a method of literary production in the late capitalist era. For Brecht it is wishful thinking to suppose that the same form can be applied to the needs and requirements of a different age and class:

Es genügt auch nicht, wenn man zeigt, wie die Mittel der Darstellung dem technischen Standard der betreffenden Epoche entsprachen. Das sagt über eine zu gewinnende literarische Technik nur aus, daß sie eben dem technischen Standard unserer Epoche entsprechen müsse, was ein frommer Wunsch bleibt. Ein frommer Wunsch bleibt es auch, zu verlangen, daß unsere Werke den gesellschaftlichen Bedürfnissen der Klasse, die wir vertreten, »ebensogut« dienen sollen, wie die Werke unserer Vorbilder der ihrigen gedient haben.<sup>44</sup>

Brecht refers to the technique of Balzac, Lukács' model for literary production, and points out that the methods at his disposal as regards perception and representation

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<sup>43</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'Bemerkungen zu einem Aufsatz', in *Romantheorie: Dokumentation ihrer Geschichte in Deutschland seit 1880*, pp.278-280 (p.278).

<sup>44</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'Notizen über realistische Schreibweise', in *Romantheorie: Dokumentation ihrer Geschichte in Deutschland seit 1880*, pp.280-282 (p.281). [Further references are given after quotations in the text]

were much different to contemporary ones, because the technical standards on which they were based were different. He recognises that contemporary technical standards also have an historical dimension, in that they are a collection of the practice and knowledge of many centuries, and a continuation of these, although not in a linear sense, nor in the manner of simple addition. Balzac is not rejected out of hand by Brecht, although he does point to the danger of using only one author as an exemplary figure. He accepts the value of technical elements in Balzac, but emphasises rather the value of comparison: 'Nötig sind viele Vorbilder; am lehrreichsten ist der Vergleich.' (p.282) It is how a particular method is used that is important for Brecht, and why a particular method was chosen or developed ahead of others.

Brecht also defends the use of a range of modern techniques of writing, including inner monologue, constant change of style, dissociation of artistic elements and montage as they had been developed, in particular, by Joyce, Döblin and Dos Passos. As opposed to Lukács, who had condemned these techniques as 'decadent' and 'formalist', Brecht was convinced that socialist writers could use these techniques in a constructive way, as valuable 'production forces' of socialist literature.

As one of the more recently published authors in the GDR, Hein's position shows, along with many of his contemporaries, greater affinity with the ideas of Brecht than those of Lukács in respect of literary style. Lukács' realist model is rejected in favour of certain techniques more commonly associated with modernism for the portrayal of contemporary GDR society. Brecht's defence of montage as a means of revealing the conditions of late capitalist society finds an echo in the composition of Hein's novel *Horns Ende*, where the split narrative technique is used to convey the experience of life in the early years of the GDR, as well as being a vehicle through which the author's distinct understanding of history finds its voice. Likewise, the first person narrative of *Drachenblut* is also a departure from the tradition of the realist novel. Even *Der Tangospieler*, where he uses the third person narrative technique for the first time in a longer work of prose fiction, owes more in terms of the development of the plot to the labyrinthine structures of Kafka than the realism of Balzac.



The variety of styles and techniques are important components which come together in Hein's understanding of his role as a chronicler. The manner in which he experiments with the style of the chronicle in a specific, GDR historical context marks the significant distinction between himself as an author and the traditional role expected of novelists in the GDR. In emphasising the value of *Bericht-Erstatten*, Hein's concept of the role of the chronicler opposes in an open and provocative manner the parameters for the novel which Lukács had proposed, and reveals instead many similarities with Benjamin's concept of the chronicle as an epic form. In the article 'Die Zensur ist überlebt, nutzlos, paradox, menschenfeindlich, volksfeindlich, ungesetzlich und strafbar', originally given as a speech at the 10th GDR Writers' Congress and first published in the West German newspaper *Die Zeit* in December 1987, Hein outlines his own concept of the role of the chronicler. In adopting the concept of the chronicle, Hein, like Lukács, places considerable emphasis on the role of experience in its production. Experience provides the basis for collecting *Musterstücke des Weltlaufs*. His work presents patterns of life to the reader, without offering interpretation and explanation. This becomes the guiding principle for the chronicle in modern times:

Denn Schriftsteller sind, denke ich, Chronisten. Schreiben ist nach meinem Verständnis dem Bericht-Erstatten verpflichtet. Natürlich ist es die Chronik eines Schriftstellers, sie ist nicht objektiv, sondern sehr viel mehr: Sie ist eingreifend und realistisch und phantastisch und magisch, Poesie eben. Eine Chronik, die von einem Menschen, dem Schriftsteller, und seiner Welt erzählt und nur dann und nur dadurch von Interesse ist. Dafür sind Erfahrungen die Voraussetzung.<sup>45</sup>

Hein appears to make a distinction between the writer's chronicle and the chronicle in its classic form. Whilst maintaining the principle of *Bericht-Erstatten* as derived from Benjamin's description of the storyteller and chronicler, he nevertheless recognises the personal input of the writer in the production of his work.

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<sup>45</sup> Chrisoph Hein, 'Die Zensur ist überlebt, nutzlos, paradox, menschenfeindlich, volksfeindlich, ungesetzlich und strafbar', in *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.77-104 (pp.99-100).

In the essay 'Die Zeit, die nicht vergehen kann oder Das Dilemma des Chronisten. Gedanken zum Historikerstreit anlässlich zweier deutscher vierzigster Jahrestage', originally delivered as a lecture at the Folkwang-Hochschule Essen on 29 May 1989, Hein links his criticism of GDR historical writing to the concept of the chronicler. He recalls the accusations and recriminations from both East and West German historians during the *Historikerstreit* against the use of historical writing in the service of the state as an agent of ideology, and the warnings against the practice of identifying with a form of historical writing which is itself an agent in encouraging identification along national and cultural lines:

Beschwörend wurde von einer Geschichtsschreibung mit dem Zweck trans-rationaler Verankerung, einer tiefer grundierten Identität und kollektiv vermittelter Sinnstiftung gewarnt.<sup>46</sup>

Hein shares the view that it is not the purpose of historical writing to be engaged in the consolidation of national identity or political power, and claims first hand experience of such restrictive practice through the demands made upon literature. The author, he maintains, is also a historian, a writer of stories with the same goals as the historian, namely to be a chronicler of his times, although via different means:

Ich halte solche Bedenken für gerechtfertigt, und ich teile sie sogar als Betroffener, denn nicht nur an die Geschichts- und Gesellschaftswissenschaften, auch an die Literatur werden immer wieder derartige Ansprüche gestellt. Der Autor, der ja *auch* ein Historiker ist, ein Schreiber von Geschichten mit einer vergleichbaren Zielstellung, nämlich Chronist der Zeit zu sein, allerdings mit anderen, nicht-wissenschaftlichen Mitteln, ist gleichfalls mit solchen zusätzlichen Forderungen konfrontiert, die literaturfremd und sogar literaturfeindlich sind. (p.116)

As with Benjamin's approach to this question, the conventional distinctions between the chronicle and literary writing become blurred. However, with Hein both the writer and the historian become chroniclers in their own right, the historian through the academic discipline of historical writing and the author through the artistic discipline of literature.

It is in the nature of the role of historical writing in both its manifestations that it should remain independent of the machinations of the state or of religion, according to

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<sup>46</sup> In *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.105-136 (p.116). [Further references are given after quotations in the text]

Hein. Historical writing in support of an ideology or religion is a breach of its understanding with history itself. By its very nature it cannot be suited to the task of engaging in support for one or the other, for to do so would undermine its own rationale. On the contrary, it is the role of literature and of historical writing to challenge established opinions in order to correct a picture which is fixed and one-sided. The duty of the chronicler in Hein's understanding has always been to take an impartial and detached stance in his recording of the past. He must allow all opinions to be heard, and draw attention to their virtues and their failings without prejudice. It is an onerous responsibility, which only a fool could claim to have successfully accomplished:

Sinnstiftung und Religionsersatz. Wir sind uns schnell einig, daß es nicht die Aufgabe von Geschichtsschreibung und Literatur sein kann und darf, dem Staat und der Kirche beizuspringen. Der Dissens, die abweichende Meinung, die ja immer eine Abweichung von der herrschenden Meinung ist, wird von uns verlangt, um ein einseitiges, erstarrtes Bild zu korrigieren. Ein Chronist, also auch der Autor als Chronist seiner Zeit, ist als Religionsstifter untauglich, da für ihn das erste Gebot jeder Religion nicht gilt, nämlich andere Götter nicht anzuerkennen. Der Chronist muß dem anderen Gott Gerechtigkeit widerfahren lassen, er hat die Tugenden und die Untugenden aller Götter zu nennen. Er hat nicht zu huldigen, vielmehr darf er den Blick nicht senken, muß alles wahrnehmen und aufzeichnen können. Und das ohne Haß und Eifer, also gelassen und unparteiisch. Das ist, seit es Geschichtsschreibung und Literatur überhaupt gibt, die Pflicht des Chronisten, des Historikers wie des Literaten. Eine Pflicht, die eingelöst zu haben nur ein Narr oder Spitzbube für sich behaupten kann. (pp.116-117)

Hein's insistence on the impartiality of the chronicler when recording the events of the past reflects Benjamin's position with regard to the chronicler as outlined in the third proposition of the theses on history. Any form of historical writing which allows itself to be influenced by the interests of ideology or other considerations outside of the task of recording dutifully the events of the past is therefore incomplete, and as such does not fulfil its role. This statement by Hein on the nature of the chronicle, whether literary or historical, also acts as a guideline for the arguments concerning the nature and presentation of history which finds its literary representation in the novel *Horns Ende*.

Hein's essay warns against allowing historical writing to become the tool of ideology, for only by remaining loyal to the duties and responsibilities with which it is endowed can it hope to offer an alternative to what Benjamin describes as the triumphal procession of the rulers, the victors of history. Rather, what is required is a critical

investigation of the idols which would appropriate historical writing for the means of their own glorification and self-justification:

Nicht Sinnstiftung und Religionsersatz, vielmehr ein Prüfen und Bezweifeln des Sinns, ein kritisches Durchleuchten der Gottheiten sind gefordert. Nicht die Umarmung durch den Staat, durch die Herrschenden hat der Chronist zu fürchten, wenn er diese Aufgabe befriedigend löst, eher den Scheiterhaufen für sich und seine Schriften. (p.117)

The duties of the chronicler as outlined by Hein now begin to encroach upon those of the historical materialist as characterised by Benjamin. The critical stance which Hein demands of the chronicler goes beyond the merely impartial recording of events. This critical position is one which Benjamin attributes to the role of the historical materialist. Benjamin writes in the 6th proposition of the theses on history that to write about the past does not mean to see an event as a precise reconstruction of how it took place in the past. Rather, it means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes by at a critical moment, when it runs the risk of appropriation by the historical narrative of the ruling class. In such an instance, the event falls from the memory of the historical subject and enters the domain of the tradition of the ruling class, from which point it is moulded to the purpose of the historical narrative of that class:

Vergangenes historisch artikulieren heißt nicht, es erkennen 'wie es denn eigentlich gewesen ist'. Es heißt, sich einer Erinnerung bemächtigen, wie sie im Augenblick einer Gefahr aufblitzt. Dem historischen Materialismus geht es darum, ein Bild der Vergangenheit festzuhalten, wie es sich im Augenblick der Gefahr dem historischen Subjekt unversehens einstellt. Die Gefahr droht sowohl dem Bestand der Tradition wie ihren Empfängern. Für beide ist sie ein und dieselbe: sich zum Werkzeug der herrschenden Klasse herzugeben.<sup>47</sup>

Further, in the 7th proposition, Benjamin criticises the historicist approach to the past and the belief that it is necessary to empathise with the past in order to gain an understanding of it. Benjamin asks the question, with whom are the historicists empathising in order to attempt to gain an understanding of the past, and concludes that it is always in the victors. At any point in history, the rulers are the heirs of those who have ruled before, consequently, empathy in history is always on the side of the victors of history, whose historical narrative has been appropriated by their heirs as it was handed down to them. Benjamin uses the metaphor of the triumphal procession to describe the relationship between the historical narrative of the victors of history,

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<sup>47</sup> 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', p.695.



which represents the cultural spoils which are paraded by the ruling class over the vanquished.

The historical materialist, however, neither takes part in the victory procession of the ruling class, nor is downtrodden by it, but remains a distanced observer. As such, he bears witness not only to the great creators of the cultural spoils, but also to the oppression of the masses, with whose labour and bondage the cultural artefacts of the victors were bought. The historical materialist brushes history the wrong way in order to uncover the evidence of the barbarity which has played an integral role in the forming of the culture of the victors:

Sie werden im historischen Materialisten mit einem distanzierten Betrachter zu rechnen haben. Denn was er an Kulturgütern überblickt, das ist ihm samt und sonders von einer Abkunft, die er nicht ohne Grauen bedenken kann. Es dankt sein Dasein nicht nur der Mühe der großen Genien, die es geschaffen haben, sondern auch der namenlosen Fron ihrer Zeitgenossen. Es ist niemals ein Dokument der Kultur, ohne zugleich ein solches der Barbarei zu sein. Und wie es selbst nicht frei ist von Barberei, so ist es auch der Prozeß der Überlieferung nicht, in der es von dem einen an den anderen gefallen ist. Der historische Materialist rückt daher nach Maßgabe des Möglichen von ihr ab. Er betrachtet es als seine Aufgabe, die Geschichte gegen den Strich zu bürsten.<sup>48</sup>

Hein shows his proximity to Benjamin in this context too, attacking the cynical use of history by both sides in the *Historikerstreit* to cover over the atrocities of recent German history. Once more he borrows the vocabulary of Benjamin in claiming that if the victor has no need to defend himself against history, then the loser requires the historian on his side as advocate:

Wenn der Sieger sich vor der Geschichte nicht zu verteidigen braucht, so bedeutet dieser zynische Satz auch, daß der Verlierer den Historiker als Anwalt benötigt.<sup>49</sup>

Hein does not write about the duties of the chronicler in the context of historical materialism, for this term appears to have lost its validity for him in the light of his experience of GDR historical writing. The concept of historical materialism is compromised by its appropriation and subsequent misuse in the name of the state. Nevertheless, the role of the historical materialist is implied in the moral and philosophical affinity with Benjamin's ideas as they appear in the theses on history.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp.696-697.

<sup>49</sup> 'Die Zensur ist überlebt, nutzlos, paradox, menschenfeindlich, volksfeindlich, ungesetzlich und strafbar', p.110.



Although it is apparent that Hein's concept of the chronicler is derived from Benjamin's considerations of the role of the chronicler and historical materialist, Hein does not comment directly on Benjamin's theses on history. Indeed, his one, significant consideration of Benjamin's philosophy appears in the context of a reflection on Benjamin's essay 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit'.<sup>50</sup> In his essay 'Maelzel's Chess Player goes to Hollywood. Das Verschwinden des künstlerischen Produzenten im Zeitalter der technischen Reproduzierbarkeit' Hein inserts two images from Benjamin's theses on history; the image of the chess machine which appears in the first proposition on history, and the image of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* which constitutes the ninth. The addition of these two extracts from Benjamin's theses on history is intended to support his critique of Benjamin's essay on art in the era of its technical reproducibility. However, their inclusion in Hein's article paradoxically also draws attention to the historical foundation of Benjamin's essay on art, and its optimistic foundation on hope in the potential of technology to alter the basis for artistic production. Indeed, both Hein's and Benjamin's essays on art can be read as texts in which the underlying concerns are in the domain of historical as well as aesthetic theory.

The prologue to Benjamin's 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit' begins with a brief summary of Marx' historical analysis of labour relations and the prognostic value which this analysis acquired as a critique of capitalist means of production. It is from this that Benjamin's hope for the future of artistic production derives. Benjamin sees in technology the possibility that art will free itself from the fetters of ritual, and other bourgeois concepts such as the originality and the aura of the work of art, to become founded instead on politics. His essay does not, however, seek to acquire the status of a credo for the future production of proletarian art.

Hein's essay begins with the image taken from Benjamin's first proposition from the theses on history of Maelzel's chess player, the creation of Wolfgang Ritter von Kempelen. The illusion which the machine produces is disconcerting, giving the impression that the moves on the chess board are controlled by a puppet. Hein uses

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<sup>50</sup> In *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1/2, pp.472-508.

this image to demonstrate irrational fears which overcome many people when faced with new technology. The normal reaction is to find recourse in tradition and the reflection of human identity, values and capabilities:

Das Unbehagen an der technischen Entwicklung rettet sich erfahrungsgemäß und traditionell in die der Ratio unzugänglicheren Bereiche. "La coeur a sa raison, que la raison ne connait pas", sagt Pascal, das Herz hat seine Vernunft, die die Vernunft nicht kennt. Das Unbehagen verführt und führt uns zu dieser schwer kontrollierbaren Vernunft des Herzens, wo umgeben von der Aura der Humanität tradierte menschliche Werte, Fähigkeiten und Funktionen anscheinend erlauben, uns selbst näher zu kommen, zu uns zu kommen. Die vermißte und gesuchte Behaglichkeit besteht dort, wo wir mit uns identisch sind. Und immer, wenn gesellschaftliche, politische, technische oder künstlerische Entwicklungen uns verunsichern, ein Unbehagen in uns erregen, retten wir uns in eine Identität überkommener Werte, das heißt angenommener und respektierter, also fraglos gewordener Werte.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast to his own reservations in respect of the political potential in technological development, as well as the reactions which it triggers, Hein regards Benjamin's essay as a monument to hope. His essay as a response to Benjamin's *Kunstwerkaufsatz* is not of interest for the examples it presents in order to refute Benjamin's hopeful prognosis, nor for its analysis of the nature of artistic production, but for the manner in which the investigation reflects Hein's own historical understanding. Benjamin's utopian vision for the future of artistic production is summarised by Hein as hope in a radical change in the social function of art altogether. The future basis for art would then be a political one and not one of ritual, by which Benjamin understands the original function of the work of art, based initially around magic and later religion. The new, political basis for the work of art would in turn overcome narrow, national interests and lead to the internationalisation of art, as the new artistic product itself would be structured around its reproducibility. It is here in this ultimate statement that Hein sees the point at which Benjamin's hopes collapse:

Was Benjamin erhoffte, war die Umwälzung der gesamten sozialen Funktion der Kunst. Statt ihrer traditionellen Fundierung aufs Ritual, sah er - und setzte alles auf - ihre politische Fundierung. Die technische Reproduzierbarkeit bringe die massenhafte Verbreitung, die Verbreitung bei den Massen, ihre Befreiung von jedem elitären, ja, von jedem nationalen Interesse. Der Weltbürger Benjamin hoffte, daß die massenhafte Verbreitung der reproduzierten Kunstwerke zu einer Internationalisierung führt, zu internationalen Maß- und Wertstäben, zu einer Weltkunst. Und in ungebrochener Begeisterung formuliert er jenen Satz, in dem der Drehpunkt des Scheiterns seiner Hoffnungen liegt: 'Das reproduzierte

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<sup>51</sup> 'Maelzel's Chess Player Goes To Hollywood', pp.166-167.

Kunstwerk wird in immer steigendem Maße die Reproduktion eines auf Reproduzierbarkeit angelegten Kunstwerks'.<sup>52</sup>

Hein's critique of Benjamin is based not so much on the theoretical considerations of the impact of technology on the work of art, but on the fact that Benjamin overlooks political and economic realities which influence in general the way in which this form of artistic production is operated. In his view, the mechanics of artistic production have remained in the hands of the concerns with the economic or political power to control the nature and distribution of the product:

Wir haben dagegen heute einen anderen Vorgang zu registrieren. Die durch die Reproduzierbarkeit möglich gewordene massenweise Verbreitung des Kunstwerks führte zu einer Internationalisierung marktführender oder -beherrschender Konzerne, die Produkte der Kunst herstellen, reproduzieren und verbreiten.<sup>53</sup>

What Hein describes, and what he criticises Benjamin for omitting, is the influence of capital in transforming the new technology to its own advantage. In so doing, Hein is restating the Marxist position in respect of the ability of capitalist society to transform and accommodate itself to new conditions of production, and by so doing increase its potential to exploit the relations of production to its greater advantage. In terms of the mechanics of technical reproduction, what the masses have acquired is not the means to allow them to engage in artistic production so much as the apparatus to receive the product, which itself is defined in cultural terms by the underlying political interests of capital. In spite of the actual destruction of the aura of the work of art through the new media, the terms with which artistic production was previously associated have remained, adapted to the requirements of technical reproduction. The political basis for art which Benjamin had envisaged has instead been removed by the interests of capital and profit:

Die Reproduktion bestimmt die Produktion des Kunstwerks. Sie bestimmt sie nicht allein - wie Benjamin hoffte - technisch, sondern auch politisch. Die bestimmende Reproduktion ist selbst bestimmt vom Verkauf, vom Erfolg.<sup>54</sup>

The hope in the transformation of art through the means of technical reproduction is undermined, according to Hein, by the economic conditions under which it is

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<sup>52</sup> 'Maelzel's Chess Player Goes To Hollywood', p.173.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.176.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.178.

produced. However, Benjamin's prognosis for the development of art in the era of its technical reproducibility is not only undermined by the circumstances which determine its production. Hein argues that its reception is also influenced by elements which stand as obstacles in the way of its acceptance. He draws attention to the disconcerting effect of new technology which appears as alien in form and in which the recipient attempts to identify the familiar. The familiar is in this context the elements of tradition which form in part structures of socialisation which in turn are derived from past experience. The disconcerting effect of new technology appears in Hein's essay in the image of the chess machine, which he uses to introduce the idea of self identity and socialisation as retarding influences on technological advancement and, by implication, on political and historical practice:

Wenn wir der Identität des Menschen mit sich selbst einen hohen Wert beimessen - und auf Grund der psychischen Beschaffenheit des Menschen sind wir dazu genötigt - so dürfen wir nicht verkennen, daß die gesuchte Identität selten auf unbekannten, unerforschten Wegen zu erreichen, sondern in den geklärten, gesicherten, unumstößlichen Bereichen zu finden ist, also in den schon erreichten und bewohnten Plätzen, in den Höhlen, aus denen wir aufgebrochen sind.<sup>55</sup>

Familiarity with that which is already known and with values which have long been established and accepted is simply another way of identifying with what Benjamin regards as the victors throughout history. The text of the past, the triumphal procession of the victors bearing the cultural spoils they have appropriated for themselves, as Benjamin records in the 7th proposition of his historical theses, is the place from where these values are derived and, through the influence of structures of socialisation, the elements with the individual seeks to discover and secure self image.

Hein closes his essay with another image from Benjamin, taken from the 9th proposition from Benjamin's historical theses. This image represents the angel of history. Hein offers no commentary to this image, using it instead as a metaphor for his view of historical development in the light of his critique of the optimism which he reads into Benjamin's *Kunstwerkaufsatz*. The angel of history, as a messenger from God, is unable to intervene in the course of human destiny, blown away from its goal by a storm from paradise which condemns it to bear witness to the never ending catastrophe which is human history. The perspective of the angel is from the future. It

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.167.

sees in the past the destruction which is the future for mankind. The storm which blows the angel away from mankind in the present is what mankind terms progress:

Es gibt ein Bild von Paul Klee, das Angelus Novus heißt. Ein Engel ist darauf dargestellt, der aussieht, als wäre er im Begriff, sich von etwas zu entfernen, worauf er starrt. Seine Augen sind aufgerissen, sein Mund steht offen und seine Flügel sind ausgespannt. Der Engel der Geschichte muß so aussehen. Er hat das Antlitz der Vergangenheit zugewendet. Wo eine Kette von Begebenheiten vor *uns* erscheint, da sieht *er* eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablässig Trümmer auf Trümmer häuft und sie ihm vor die Füße schleudert. Er möchte wohl verweilen, die Toten wecken und das Zerschlagene zusammenfügen. Aber ein Sturm weht vom Paradiese her, der sich in seinen Flügeln verfangen hat und so stark ist, daß der Engel sie nicht mehr schließen kann. Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die Zukunft, der er den Rücken kehrt, während der Trümmerhaufen vor ihm zum Himmel wächst. Das, was wir den Fortschritt nennen, ist *dieser* Sturm.<sup>56</sup>

Hein's critique of the idea of progress in art through the means of its technical reproduction finds its correspondence in Benjamin's critique of the Social Democratic belief in progress through history. Nevertheless, he shares Benjamin's hope in salvation through history because, as he claims, it is a hope to which there is no human alternative:

Ich teile dennoch Benjamins Hoffnungen. Es sind Hoffnungen trotzend der Erfahrung, Hoffnungen trotz der Geschichte auf die Geschichte. Weil es Hoffnungen sind, zu denen es keine menschliche Alternative gibt.<sup>57</sup>

The following chapters will aim to explore the way in which Hein's concept of the chronicler which he develops from the reading of Benjamin's theoretical writing is employed in his fictional prose, and the manner in which this in turn confronts the official historical narrative of the GDR, to produce a chronicle of his society from which an historical investigation of GDR history can commence.

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<sup>56</sup> 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', pp.697-698.

<sup>57</sup> 'Maelzel's Chess Player Goes To Hollywood', p.193.



## Chapter 2

### Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen

Following his criticism of the GDR theatre establishment in an interview given to the East German journal *Theater der Zeit* in 1978, in which he claimed that contemporary theatre in the socialist state was so restrictive that it forced creative writers into the production of prose fiction, the following year saw the publication in the GDR of Hein's first collection of short stories, *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen*.

The volume contains eleven stories, seven of which constitute a separate collection entitled 'Ein Album Berliner Stadtansichten' and which document the extraordinary, fictional lives of several of Berlin's residents from the time of Wilhelmine Germany to the modern era under Real Socialism. Additionally, the volume includes two fictionalised accounts of events in the lives of actual, historical persons. The first of these, 'Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois'; concerns the meditations of the French poet, dramatist and historian Jean Racine, whilst preparing himself for an invitation to the Grand Lever, on both the physiological aspects of his ailing, ageing body and the mental anguish brought about by the dangers associated with the recording of historical reality in an absolutist state. The second concerns Alexander von Humboldt's valet, Johann Seifert, whose fictional letters to his wife whilst accompanying his master on a journey through Russia form the basis of the story 'Die russischen Briefe des Jägers Johann Seifert'. Both historical fictions respectively introduce and conclude the volume. Also included in the volume are Hein's Kleist parody 'Der neue (glücklichere) Kohlhaas', a cynical and comical documentation of the accountant Hubert K.'s struggle for justice in a wage dispute between himself and his state employer, and an account of a young woman's misguided visit to an old friend, 'Leb wohl, mein Freund, es ist schwer zu sterben'.

In view of the greater attention the author was later to receive in the aftermath of his first novella, *Drachenblut*, which in effect established his career as a writer of prose fiction, it is perhaps surprising that this volume of Hein's short stories has received so little critical examination. In the critical articles which did appear in the GDR and the FRG, the critics' opinion reflected the difference in cultural perspective between the two societies. Whilst Hein's interest in historical subjects was universally recognised,

his artistic approach created difficulties for the critics in the GDR. Whereas West German criticism was able to point to Hein's prose as yet another example of a dissenting voice within the oppressive world of GDR communism, East German criticism, whether by conviction or constraint, was obliged to represent the official line in terms of critical appraisal. Christoph Funke's review of Hein's short stories, along with the recently published dramas *Cromwell und andere Stücke*<sup>1</sup> bears witness to the difficulty experienced by many critics in marrying personal opinion with official demands, in spite of the 'new openness' of the Honecker era. This difficulty is apparent when the critic attempts to shed light on the authorial intent behind Hein's stories, and in so doing tries to reconcile what he clearly believes to be the legitimacy of Hein's historical critique with the question of the great significance in historical terms of the very existence of the GDR. Funke writes:

Er [Hein] will seinen Leser frei machen im Spiel mit historischen Zusammenhängen, damit ihm Souveränität für das Heute zuwächst. Nicht Gegenwärtiges im geschichtlichen Gewand will er denunzieren, sondern solche Vorgänge, Entscheidungen, Verhaltensweisen im Gestern sichtbar machen, durch die die Größe heutiger Vorgänge deutlich wird.<sup>2</sup>

Funke also discusses Hein's position with regard to history, offering an interpretation of the texts which reveals many similarities with Hein's understanding of the role of the chronicler from his appraisal of the writing of Benjamin. The reader in this instance takes on the role of the historical materialist as represented in Benjamin's theses on history, seeking explanations for the historical processes at work behind the recorded events, and using this as material through which to understand the present. The notion of being able to maintain a sovereign approach to the present recalls the position of Benjamin's historical materialist in attempting to explain history as a counter to the reactionary and oppressive work of the establishment. Having achieved this, the reader is able to take on the role of critical observer:

'Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois' läßt Heins poetisches Anliegen einsehbar werden, aus der Geschichte Kenntnisse zu gewinnen, die es ermöglichen, 'Welt' dialektisch, in ihrer widersprüchlichen Entwicklung zu betrachten, ihr ehrlich zu begegnen - und sie zum Spielmaterial zu machen für einen souveränen Umgang mit Gegenwärtigem.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christoph Hein, *Cromwell und andere Stücke* (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> Christoph Funke, 'Spiel mit Geschichte', *Neue deutsche Literatur* 10, 29 (1981), 149-152 (p.149).

<sup>3</sup> Funke, p.150.

Funke's recognition of Hein's dialectic approach to social and historical understanding, and its portrayal in his writing is significant. It is here that Hein is most obviously indebted to a Marxist approach in the formation of his authorial style. Indeed, in the production of the chronicles themselves, Hein appears to embrace the dialectic materialist aspect of Marxist theory by employing this as a critical tool, albeit in an unorthodox form through his reading of Benjamin, with which to analyse the contemporary reality of daily life in the GDR. Equally, it is his perceived absence of a dialectic approach to social and historical analysis at the official and institutional level which forms the basis for some of his most severe criticism of GDR society. His fiction brings to light the absence of dialectic analysis as arguably the most significant aspect in the survival of patterns of thought and behaviour from the past in the present.

Hein's shorter prose fictions have received scant critical attention in respect of their relation to his understanding of Benjamin's theoretical writings on history. In response to this, it will be the purpose of this chapter to consider a selection of the shorter prose fiction which makes up the volume *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen* in the context of the understanding of history which Hein derives from Benjamin, as well as to consider these stories in relation to Hein's work as a whole, identifying and discussing common themes and ideas as they appear.

In his article 'Vom Pathos der Sachlichkeit. Der Erzähler Christoph Hein', Klemens Renoldner points to the story 'Die Witwe eines Maurers', which forms part of the collection 'Ein Album Berliner Stadtansichten', as in many respects embodying the essence of Hein's future work. He writes of this particular story:

Dieser Bericht kann, nach meiner Meinung, in mehrfacher Hinsicht als Programm für das vorliegende Werk des Autors Christoph Hein angesehen werden: Als Programm für sein Verhältnis zur deutschen Geschichte, als Schreibhaltung und als poetisches Konzept. In diesem Sinn kann der Text auch gelten als Vorstudie en miniature für Erzählung und Roman.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Klemens Renoldner, 'Vom Pathos der Sachlichkeit. Der Erzähler Christoph Hein', in *Christoph Hein. Texte, Daten, Bilder*, ed. by Lothar Baier (Frankfurt/M: Sammlung Luchterhand, 1990), pp.128-137 (p128).

Whilst this statement offers a convenient basis from which to begin a discussion of Hein's short stories, it cannot be accepted without certain reservations. First, it neglects the importance of the theme of the struggle between the intellectual and authority, which is of considerable importance in both *Horns Ende* and *Der Tangospieler*, as well as two of the stories in the collection *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen*. Second, such reductionism misses the point which lies at the heart of the discussion of Hein's works in relation to the influence of Benjamin, namely the importance of the actual process of the creative act, and its wider significance in the context of historical understanding. Both these points will be dealt with in greater detail in the course of this analysis.

'Die Witwe eines Maurers' is a short account of the death of a bricklayer, and the death of his widow several decades later. As the opening paragraph indicates, the death of her husband involves the widow in a rather unusual way in the political intrigues and battles which constituted fifty years of Germany's turbulent, 20th century history:

Auf dem Waldfriedhof an der Wuhlheide in Oberschöneweide wurde in der letzten Septemberwoche eine achtundsiebzigjährige Frau beigesetzt, die, nicht gewillt, an den politischen Parteiungen, Kämpfen und Verbrechen ihrer Zeit teilzuhaben, auf eine so eigentümliche Weise in ein halbes Jahrhundert deutscher Geschichte verstrickt war, daß sie, von ihren Bekannten als bedauernswert und schamlos zugleich angesehen, in den letzten Lebensjahren ihre Wohnung kaum zu verlassen gewagt hatte.<sup>5</sup>

The death of her husband, a member of the German Communist Party, in Berlin during the March revolution of 1918 leaves the expectant mother penniless and desperate. A colleague of her husband urges the young widow to apply for a war widow's pension, and to claim that her husband was killed as an innocent passer-by from a stray bullet. The pension for which the widow successfully applies is elevated to the status of a symbol in the text, and becomes the object of political propaganda throughout the following decades. The widow's circumstances are exploited by the Nazis, who portray her husband as a victim of communism, and later by the communists after the war, who, upon hearing the true circumstances of the widow's husband's death from his former colleague grant her a pension as a victim of fascism.

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<sup>5</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Die Witwe eines Maurers', in *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen*, pp.41-43 (pp.41-42).



It is not so much the manner in which this death is interpreted by various agents of political propaganda which is the central issue here. Rather it is the personal trauma of the widow which remains the final, pathetic image of the story, alienated as she is from her former friends and indeed everything which had constituted her former life, hiding from the judgmental eye of society. Her fate is ultimately directly attributable to the political and historical circumstances which constitute the motivating force behind the short text, and which act as the backdrop to her personal drama.

The anecdotal form of story-telling on which Hein's style is based, related as it is to the chronicle through its origin in the oral tradition of story-telling, is clearly demonstrated by the story 'Die Witwe eines Maurers'. The absence of explanation within the text creates the superficial illusion that the changing significance of the widow's pension is the dynamic element of the tale, against which modern German history is reduced to the level of context. However, the manner in which history appears in the text shows this to be a fallacy. The widow is not only a victim of her husband's death, which leaves her destitute and dependant upon the state for financial support, but is also a victim of history, which implicates her in the events which constitute the 'greater' German history:

Das dritte deutsche Reich übernahm ungebeten die Zahlungen. Zum stillen Erschrecken der Frau versäumte es das Regime nicht, gelegentlich in dem Propagandamaterial des Nazistaates, für das man den traditionellen Namen Zeitung beibehalten hatte, ihres toten Ehemannes zu gedenken als eines Opfers der Roten und Märzverbrecher. Die Ehrenrente wurde erhöht, und die Witwe, um ihr Leben fürchtend, wagte nicht, Einspruch zu erheben.<sup>6</sup>

The question of personal responsibility is also an issue here, although there is no indication in the text that the widow is in any way capable of altering the course of events as they unfold around her. Nevertheless, her acceptance of the pension in spite of the circumstances under which it is made available to her, is an action which implicates her in the broader historical text, an implication which carries with it a moral responsibility also.

The effect produced by this combination of stylistic elements is not a literary adaptation of contemporary German history *per se*, but a critical reappraisal of the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 42.



past in its continuing, dialectic relationship with the present. In addition, the perspective which the narrative provides by making the superficial focus of attention the banal, bureaucratic issue of the eligibility of the widow to receive a pension after the death of her husband, allows the historical text which underlies this to appear in an unfamiliar form. By concentrating on the object of the pension, the political and historical issues which surround it are juxtaposed, appearing impartially in relation to the object itself, and highlighting aspects of continuity and change across distinct political systems over time. Hein's prose therefore creates a different perspective from which past events can be viewed, making them appear once more contemporary and relevant. It invites history to be reconsidered at the moment it appears, almost accidentally, within the text. Hein's approach as a chronicler invites the reader to re-examine the past in a similar manner to that of Benjamin's historical materialist, allowing a memory to be seized suddenly, as it appears, and before it faces the danger of appropriation as a cultural object into the historical text of a ruling class. The manner in which he achieves this allows the reader in turn to engage in the process of historical explanation, in a similar manner to Benjamin's historical materialist, whose method involves, as he terms it, 'die Geschichte gegen den Strich zu bürsten'.<sup>7</sup> Hein's chronicles attempt to confront the violence and barbarism through which closure is forced on the text of history by compelling a dialectic confrontation with the past.

Hein's re-writing of the historical text through fiction in order to redeem it once more for history is a measured practical - as well as theoretical and aesthetic - response to the conditions under which the writing of history in the GDR took place. Hein recognised this fact in relation to the state censorship of intellectual life and information in general, when he commented 'Statt der Zeitung kaufen sich die Leute ein Buch'.<sup>8</sup>

A further example of the manner in which Hein's style as a literary chronicler encourages the reader to reconsider history occurs in the story 'Die Familiengruft'. The story also forms part of the cycle entitled 'Ein Album Berliner Stadtansichten'.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', p.697.

<sup>8</sup> Dieter Krebs, 'Interview mit Christoph Hein', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 3 (1990), 177-180 (p.183), (first publ. in *Berliner Zeitung*, 4./5. November 1989).

The cycle illustrates in different ways the similarities as well as the contrasts between individual and social history. Through the examples of the individual histories, the author once again addresses the fundamental questions which arise from the immediate past, in an effort to reconsider and understand the present as a product of this past, in respect of both elements of continuity and change. Hein's shorter prose fiction also contributes to the development of an alternative understanding of history in the GDR, albeit in the fictional form of the literary chronicle. The cycle can be regarded in part as a response to the criticism which Hein was later to make in the essay 'Die fünfte Grundrechenart' with regard to the formulaic approach to the writing of history in the GDR.

'Die Familiengruft' records the fate of a Jewish family in Berlin at the time of the Nazi dictatorship. However, instead of fulfilling and repeating conventional expectations with regard to Holocaust history, the text immediately departs from the accepted account of the genocide of the Jews when the narrator reveals that his uncle, two weeks after his arrest and deportation to the concentration camp Ettersberg, returns to his family in Berlin:

Am 10. November 1938 wurde mein Onkel gemeinsam mit drei anderen Schauspielers des jüdischen Theaters verhaftet und in Polizeigewahrsam gebracht, von wo aus er vier Tage später in das Konzentrationslager Ettersberg übergeführt wurde. Zwei Wochen nach seiner Verhaftung erschien er wieder bei seiner Familie in Berlin.<sup>9</sup>

This unexpected turn of events is compounded further when uncle Eugen discovers he can continue to work in the theatre as an actor. In addition, the narrator recalls how his uncle, several years prior to his death, had applied for permission to emigrate from Germany, only to be dissuaded by the thought that, as a German-speaking actor he would find no work abroad, as well as by the advice of friends in the *Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten* who urged him to remain patriotic to the state, and not lend support to the so-called hysteria being spread by other co-religionists. The combination of these elements in the text create in the character of the narrator's uncle a figure who does not conform to the generally accepted stereotype of a Jewish victim of the Holocaust. However, it is not the aim of the author to engage in a revisionist re-writing of history by literary means. On the contrary, Hein's text, by

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<sup>9</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Die Familiengruft', in *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen*, pp.43-48 (pp.43-44)

presenting the reader with an unconventional and personal Jewish family chronicle of life under the Nazi dictatorship brings the history of the period once more into a new and challenging focus.

The fate of the family is documented through the literary device of a farewell letter, discovered amongst the blankets found in the family vault of the Jewish cemetery. Again, the text departs from a more familiar historical representation of the Holocaust when it is revealed that the family meet their ultimate end as a direct consequence of having been informed on by a visitor to the cemetery, presumably a fellow Jew. The sadistic humiliation which the five drunken police officers inflict on the helpless family is too much for the narrator's uncle to bear. He puts an end to his family's degradation and torture by poisoning his wife and children, and finally himself.

There are once again many similarities in style and content between the story 'Die Familiengruft' and aspects of Hein's later work. The emphasis throughout is on the character of totalitarianism. The text reveals the misguided trust of people in an inherent sense of decency and reasonableness in the Nazi state. It shows the conformity brought about through fear and the threat of physical violence which encouraged people to denounce their natural allies and friends. The mechanics of both psychological and physical torture and oppression are portrayed, as well as the family's struggle in the face of all this to uphold basic, humanitarian principles in an atmosphere of ever increasing intimidation and fear. The latter finds expression in uncle Eugen's private performances of extracts from musical comedies in the family vault in the Jewish cemetery at a time of acute crisis and indisputable hopelessness for both him and his family, with only suicide as a final, desperate, alternative.

Aside from the obvious connection between Benjamin's own suicide, as told in Hein's play *Passage*,<sup>10</sup> and the fate of the Kreindler family, the text also reflects the very real dangers which Benjamin saw in the Nazi movement; the normalisation of persecution and the inevitable destruction of humanitarian principles. Benjamin also points out in the theses on history that it is necessary to arrive at an understanding of history which

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<sup>10</sup> Christoph Hein, *Passage* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand Theater, 1988) (first publ. in *Theater der Zeit*, vol. 5, 1987, pp.54-64).

shows the so called 'exceptional circumstances' of the fascist dictatorship as constituting the historical norm. The eighth proposition of the theses on history reads: 'Die Tradition der Unterdrückten belehrt uns darüber, daß der "Ausnahmestand", in dem wir leben, die Regel ist. Wir müssen zu einem Begriff der Geschichte kommen, der dem entspricht. [...].'<sup>11</sup>

This recognition of a state of violence and oppression as constituting the norm in history - one of Benjamin's counters to the Social Democratic notion of progress in history, - is also taken up and developed by Hein in the form of the literary chronicle. Hein extends the history of oppression from the time of German unification in 1871 to the period of the establishment of the GDR as a separate German state, as witnessed in the opening story from the collection 'Ein Album Berliner Stadtansichten', entitled 'Friederike, Martha, Hilde'. The concluding remark to the family chronicle, which spans five generations of life in Berlin, simply states: 'Ungewöhnliches sei nicht zu berichten.'<sup>12</sup> This statement can be considered in two distinct ways; at one level it constitutes an ironic and pathetic conclusion to a chronology of oppression and violence which reflects through the personal histories of the characters the course of modern German history. At another level, however, in the context of the discussion of violence and oppression as the social norm which appears in Benjamin's understanding of history, this remark can be read as an endorsement of Benjamin's understanding of history against the idea of progress.

The chronology which Hein presents in 'Friederike, Martha, Hilde' is not one of progress but one of decline. The deliberate reversal of perspective can be regarded as provocative in the context of the writing and understanding of history in the GDR, given that the focus of the story is not the progressive history of the working class movement, but rather the decline of the *Kleinbürgertum*. The author uses irony as a literary device which he directs against a specific understanding of history, insofar as the story begins and ends with the underlying belief in the concept of history as a continuum of progress. However, whilst it begins with the idea of progress as understood in a capitalist, bourgeois liberal context, 'Friederike, Martha, Hilde' ends

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<sup>11</sup> 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', p.697.

<sup>12</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Friederike, Martha, Hilde', in *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen*, pp.29-41 (p.41).

with the idea of progress in the context of a planned, socialist society. In both cases, the idea of progress through history proves to be a fallacy, as patterns of thought and behaviour from the past are carried through in varying guises from one social form to the next.

The idea of progress is linked at the beginning of the story to material prosperity. Friederike's marriage at the age of seventeen to a Jewish haberdasher some twenty years her senior raises her material status from the poverty of her family background. Her father, described as a self-employed refuse collector, is resentful of the relative prosperity of the haberdasher and pours scorn on his work and his Jewish origins. He nevertheless consents to Friederike's marriage in order to ease his own circumstances. Friederike's material advancement is set against the general increase in trade and prosperity which the city of Berlin acquired as the capital of a newly unified Germany after 1871. However, this apparent progress is soon threatened, both politically by the restrictions imposed on German industrial and territorial expansionism which in turn would lead to the outbreak of the First World War, and at a personal level symbolised by their childless marriage. The child as a symbol of hope for the future is a common theme in literature and is particularly significant for the story 'Friederike, Martha, Hilde' insofar as this symbol of hope is turned on its head. It is in relation to the figure of the child that the evils of society become visible, in the form of social and an increasingly virulent racial prejudice. When Friederike finally conceives a child, it is as a result of an adulterous affair. The birth of the child, which is nevertheless welcomed with great joy by her husband, becomes the focal point for further marital disharmony.

Friederike's material demise follows the death of her husband. Her lack of business understanding coupled with her isolation within the Jewish business community as a result of her husband's conversion to Christianity result in ruin, the experience of which finds expression in anti-Semitism.

The character of her daughter Martha is presented as a contrast to that of Friederike, yet this alone proves insufficient to protect her from a fate which is immediately linked to her material circumstances and the influence of her mother's attitudes. Forced by her mother into social isolation in an attempt to conceal behind the facade of the expensive apartment Friederike's shame at her ever worsening financial situation,



Martha is denied any sort of life beyond that of work and home. Her main characteristic is the desire to please. Late in life she marries an infantile man whose considerations do not extend beyond himself, and who attempts to reduce everything around him to an object of his own desires. To this end he is even responsible for sacrificing Martha's life in an absurd act of jealousy when complications arise at the birth of their fourth child.

The story of the material decline of the family occurs against the historical backdrop of the First World War and the turbulent history of Weimar democracy. The effects created by this period of political and social upheaval at a personal level are portrayed through the life of the child of the third generation, Hilde. The death of her mother and her father's immediate re-marriage result in Hilde being sent to live with her childless aunt and uncle. Her displacement in the family upheaval, in addition to the emotional confusion of a new order which forces her to recognise her aunt and uncle as her father and mother, leads to a crisis of identity and a need for a sense of belonging. This makes Hilde an easy target for the Nazi propaganda she encounters when she joins a special boarding school, set up under the auspices of the *Bund deutscher Mädchen*, intended to teach young women the necessary skills involved in running a household. It is as part of this organisation that Hilde discovers a sense of identity and freedom which she had not experienced since early childhood:

Hilde blieb drei Jahre in dem Internat und wurde vor allem in jenen Fächern ausgebildet, die eine deutsche Frau in dieser Zeit zu beherrschen hatte: Kochen, Nähen und nationalsozialistische Staatskunde. Es waren, wie sie sich später erinnerte, die heitersten Jahre ihres Lebens. Der vollständig organisierte Tagesablauf der Mädchen war für Hilde beglückend, da sie erstmals seit ihrer Kindheit ein oder zwei Stunden am Tag hatte, die ihr allein gehörten und in denen sie sich beschäftigen konnte, ohne das ständige, bedrückende Gefühl, ihre Pflichten zu vernachlässigen.<sup>13</sup>

The reinforcement of traditional roles for women which occurs as part of National Socialist socialisation finds Hilde a willing recipient. The only new educational component is the element of National Socialist indoctrination, which is also easily assimilated by her, having received from her grandmother a tendency towards anti-Semitism. She discovers in the simple solutions offered to complex social and personal issues a sense of security which her unsettled childhood had denied her. Her

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.36-37.

intuitive reception of National Socialist culture develops quickly into fanaticism, which is strengthened by the new sense of identity which her education affords her.

The parallels are evident between the upheaval in Hilde's personal life after the death of her mother and the trauma of being passed on to new parents, and the many contradictions inherent in Weimar society which assisted the rise in popularity of the National Socialist Party. The text creates a mirror image, with a narrow, personal history reflecting the broader social history against which it is set. Hilde's story is the story of the fall of Weimar Germany and the rise of fascism in miniature. This personal history reaches its climactic resolution in the chaos which results from the inevitable contradictions and paradoxes produced by the simplistic message of Nazi ideology. Having discovered an identity for herself in the National Socialist movement, Hilde experiences at first hand the consequences of this ideology. As a direct consequence of her grandfather's Jewish origins, she becomes a victim of the viciously discriminatory Nazi racial policy. Despite the fact that she excels under the new system of ideological indoctrination, she is forced to leave the boarding school and return home to her uncle.

The anti-Semitism which found its everyday expression through Friederike and her father now turns full circle against Hilde. The story records the development of racial hatred from its common expression in daily life to its incorporation as a part of political practice. A connection is created between earlier forms of thought and behaviour and their development under National Socialism. Through the character of Hilde, the past and the present are brought together, with all the inherent contradictions intact. These contradictions are embodied in the character of Hilde's uncle who, as a committed Nazi, has difficulty reconciling his love for his adopted daughter with his embarrassment at the stigma of what he considers to be her racial impurity. His political allegiances and his status as a member of a class which both actively and passively lent its support to National Socialism are now called into question. The uncle becomes mistrustful of her, and in a manner akin to a religious ritual, ready to purge any traits of character which might betray her racial origin:

Sie wurde wieder im Haushalt des Onkels aufgenommen, wenngleich die Entdeckung der Schulleitung diesen tief erschütterte. Er liebte das angenommene Mädchen nach wie vor,

begegnete ihr aber mit Mißtrauen und Wachsamkeit, um, wie er sagte, den Juden in ihr aufzuspüren und auszutreiben.<sup>14</sup>

Hilde's story brings to light many of the attitudes prevalent in German society at the time which were carried over from the past and which permitted the establishment of the National Socialist dictatorship. These are particularly apparent through the character of Hilde's uncle, whose conformity and desire for order within a world of middle class prejudices, found a corresponding expression in National Socialism.

Having been denied by her uncle the chance of marriage to the son of a distiller in Lichtenberg, Hilde becomes the wife of a war invalid shortly after the death of her former fiancé on the Eastern front. The symbolic function of the child in the text again comes to the fore when Hilde gives birth to a mentally handicapped son. The child, Walther, is the physical embodiment of the ruin and destruction which history has heaped upon the present. Alienated by his disability from participation and interaction with the outside world, he represents the rupture which divides the new generation from its forefathers. The male heir is born weak, unable to continue the tradition, and wholly dependant upon his mother for life. A change occurs at this point, however, in the relation between the present and the past which coincides with defeat of fascism and the resulting division of Germany. Hilde breaks with the patriarchal past when her new husband leaves her after she refuses to place the child in an institution. In spite of the continuity of patriarchal aggression in the attempted expulsion of the son from the family home, Hilde resists the pressure to give up her son. By successfully caring for the child on her own, she not only surprises medical opinion with her achievements, but also, in terms of the symbolic significance of her work as a *Trümmerfrau*, points the way to the possibility of building a new order after the destruction of the old.

Hilde's attempt to distance herself from her past, assisted by the calm routine of family life with her son, is further reinforced when she refuses to recognise her father in a chance meeting by the grave of her mother. Nevertheless, the optimism and hope which this severance from the oppressive continuity of her personal history represents, proves to be an illusion. In the short, concluding paragraphs to the story, there is no indication of a profound change in social conditions under socialism. Her living

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.38.

conditions are ordinary and comfortable, her life characterised by the blandness and monotony of routine. Her main preoccupations are her work and the care of her son. Walther's death in 1971 at the age of twenty six significantly also marks the beginning of the Honecker era in the GDR. As a comment on the brief history of the GDR, it serves to demonstrate the illusory nature of any claim of a change in the fundamental condition of society under GDR socialism. As if to confirm this, Hilde's only reaction to the death of her son is one of relief that his life had been cut short before her own death, and that no one else would therefore be responsible for his care.

The style of the literary chronicle is to present the individual lives of the characters against an historical backdrop without recourse to explanation for the relation or interaction between the two. The connections between the two are nevertheless apparent, as the attitudes and actions of the characters themselves evolve in a clear, historical context and reflect that historical context. It is the task of the reader, however, to engage in analysis of the literary text in order to discover meaning from the history against which it is set.

In the remaining stories which make up the collection 'Ein Album Berliner Stadtansichten' the actual historical context against which individual histories are portrayed does not emerge through the text to the same degree as is the case in the story 'Friederike, Martha, Hilde'. The continuing influence of the past in determining the events of the present remains, however, in the form of structures of socialisation. This is particularly prominent where the texts themselves are concerned with systems of education, as is the case in the stories 'Der Sohn' and 'Frank, eine Kindheit mit Vätern'. In 'Friederike, Martha, Hilde' the influence of socialisation in education is demonstrated by the manner in which anti-Semitism, for example, is shown to have developed from an irrational, middle class prejudice into part of the official educational program of the National Socialist state, and how easily this is assimilated into the educational program due to its previous establishment in the collective consciousness.

In the story 'Frank, eine Kindheit mit Vätern', the focus of the text becomes the repressive and destructive influence of the *Leistungsprinzip*. The themes of continuity and change in history are once more the underlying features of a text which bears the



anecdotal, stylistic characteristics of the literary chronicle. The story demonstrates the continuity of educational values which have their origins in bourgeois capitalist society, and which have merely been superimposed on the educational system which prevails under GDR socialism, regardless of whether or not such a system is compatible with the educational goals and requirements of a socialist society. The argument which underlies the story has parallels in the context of the literary debate between Brecht and Lukács in respect of realism and the novel. Brecht's criticism of Lukács centres on the incompatibility of the application of a realist model for literary fiction, the origins and values of which were established under distinct social and political conditions, to literary production in a society which reflects a different social reality. Applying Brecht's argument to the field of education, what Hein's text reveals is the application of the same model from one social form to the next. Whereas Brecht saw in socialist society the emergence of individuals whose characteristics were intrinsically different to the individuals of bourgeois capitalism, Hein's texts, in particular 'Der Sohn', reveal fictional characters who either display the same individual characteristics as those educated under a different political system, or who come to grief as a result of the pressures brought to bear on them by the necessity to achieve.

The title of the story 'Frank, eine Kindheit mit Vätern' itself implies the continuity of the past in the present. The belief in the social rewards of academic achievement is apparent at the outset, where it is revealed that the main ambition of Frank's great grandfather is to enable his son to receive a good education. The desire for material advancement is the factor which links all the generations of Frank's family. The failure of personal ambition through a combination of greed, trickery and misfortune means that this ambition is then passed on to the next generation in the hope of fulfilment. The attitudes which prevail are indicative of the economic conditions of the society in which they appear.

The tensions between old structures and new goals are embodied in the character Frank. Aspirations which are themselves the product of a different political and economic system are carried over to the new socialist society, as represented by the father's desire for his son's success, in spite of the considerable limits to his son's ability. Frank's learning difficulties are a cause of great concern for his parents, who



fear sending him to a special school in case this might prejudice his chances in later life. The reaction of the parents is again indicative of attitudes which have their origins in the past rather than the educational ideals of the socialist state. Nevertheless, Frank senses the disappointment of his parents and sees no possibility of reconciliation. His first, unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide happens at the age of nine. The following Summer, Frank cannot bear to upset his parents with the news that, due to his poor academic achievements and for the sake of his education he must miss the school trip to the Harz and attend another class instead. He jumps from a fifth floor window and ends his life.

The perspective from which the *Leistungsprinzip* is presented in 'Frank, eine Kindheit mit Vätern', is altered in 'Der Sohn'. Individualism and social success constitute the central themes of the story, yet within this framework Hein also develops an artistic position which is significant when considered in relation to the argument between Brecht and Lukács over realism and the nature of literary production. The main character, Pawel, by name alone invites comparisons with a fictional character of considerable literary significance in the socialist literary canon, namely the young revolutionary of Gorky's *Mother*. Whereas Gorky's Pawel meets the criteria which Lukács later emphasised in terms of the creation of great figures in socialist literature through which the interaction of human beings in struggle could be portrayed, Hein's character represents an ironic comment on this particular maxim for literary production. Neither does the Pawel of Hein's story reflect the arguments which were put forward by Brecht as a counter to Lukács' proposal for socialist literary production. Brecht recognised the difference in the nature of individuals as a consequence of the experience of socialist society, and criticised Lukács' insistence on the reproduction of characters originally created from the experience of capitalist society in the production of socialist literature. This different nature is not apparent in Hein's character Pawel. Rather, the latter demonstrates the continued survival of bourgeois personality types in socialist society. Hein's narrative style, in keeping with his concept of the literary chronicle, avoids any attempt to explain or analyse the events it records, and by so doing allows Pawel's actions to be judged objectively.

Unlike the character in Gorky's *Mother*, Hein's Pawel is already born in a socialist society. The son of a family with impeccable socialist credentials, he experiences the

privileges which this society is able to offer. His father was a political internee in the concentration camp Groß-Rosen and his mother a *Trümmerfrau*. Pawel himself was named after the Red Army officer in charge of the brigade which liberated the camp in which his father was incarcerated. Pawel's pedigree is therefore outstanding in terms of the history of GDR socialism. However, socialist principle and ideal of equality is shown to contrast with a reality in which social status and background play an important role in determining individual success. Social structures similar to those of bourgeois capitalist society reappear under GDR socialism.

The privileges afforded Pawel and his family are apparent from the outset. His father's political importance enables the family to live in a four room apartment on the Kissingenstraße. With status comes respect, which impresses Pawel and encourages him towards emulation and self-motivated actions which his teachers have neither the ability nor the inclination to control. He willingly takes responsibility upon himself, becoming group chairman of the *Pionierorganisation* during his time at primary school. Rigorous conformity with ideology leads him to uncover the father of a school friend as an enemy of the state, forcing the latter to escape to the French sector of Berlin for fear of reprisals. His self-image is fashioned on the superficial symbols of identity with the state. The enthusiasm with which he embraces this identity with ideology at times invites mockery, which serves only to strengthen his resolve.

However, the symbols and rituals of a collective state identity contrast sharply with the purpose of self advancement to which they are applied. The concept of collective identity proves an illusion, insofar as the masses, as represented by Pawel's school colleagues, retain their amorphous, collective character through lip-service to the rituals of the state. By contrast, Pawel uses the collective identity promoted by the state in the pursuit of individual recognition and the fulfilment of personal aims.

In his adolescence, the true nature of this dichotomy between individual and collective identity becomes apparent when Pawel turns his back on his childhood allegiances to embrace the philosophies of individualism. He reads Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Sartre, contemporary American literature and takes an interest in French surrealism. At the same time, he develops a contempt for the manner in which, in particular, history and civics are taught, supporting instead the attacks on GDR cultural policy

which appeared in the West German press. His revolt is directed at the areas of the GDR educational curriculum which specifically aim to promote a sense of collective national identity, namely history and the ideological education of socialist citizens (*Staatsbürgerkunde*):

Seine Lehrer reagierten zurückhaltend auf ironische Bemerkungen und Unverschämtheiten, mit denen er den Unterricht vor allem in Geschichte und Staatsbürgerkunde zu stören suchte. Erst die von ihm eingestandene Urheberchaft an einer Wandzeitung, die unter Verwendung von Ausschnitten westdeutscher Zeitungen die staatliche Kulturpolitik verunglimpfte, veranlaßte die Schulleitung, ihn zu einem Gespräch vorzuladen.<sup>15</sup>

The vain attachment to the Spanish derivative of his name demonstrates once more the importance of symbols as a superficial means of affirming identity. Yet what his elders regard as an adolescent revolt against paternal authority proves to be a more committed, egotistical reaction. In each case Pawel's actions have an ideological foundation. However, there is no indication that they have at the same time an ideological motivation. The absence of ideological motivation reveals these actions as vain and self-serving, motivated simply by the desire for recognition and respect.

His father's social standing and his intervention save Pawel from punishment and protect his reputation. The hypocrisy inherent within the system is revealed by the leniency which saves Pawel where others are condemned. Ultimately, the security provided by his background, as well as his recognised intelligence, enable him to successfully complete a university degree in economics. His future in socialist society is now assured. Having gained the respect and recognition his vanity and egotism craved, he is able to find his own compromise with society:

Während der Studienjahre wurde Pawel auf Grund seiner vorzüglich absolvierten Zwischenprüfungen ein Leistungsstipendium zugesprochen. Nach dem Studium promovierte er und galt in seiner Sektion als einer der meistversprechenden jungen Wissenschaftler. Bei den Kollegen war er beliebt, und seine Meinungen waren stets geachtet als die des Sohnes eines verdienten, hohen Funktionärs.

Pawel selbst aber fügte sich in den zuverlässigen Lauf der Welt. Er begriff, daß sein Aufbegehren gegen eine abgeleitete Existenz und die wilde Suche nach seinem wirklichen und eigenen Leben schon ein Teil desselben war, und gab sich zufrieden mit den unaufhörlichen Erfolgen.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Der Sohn', in *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen*, pp.62-70 (p.66).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.70.

In contrast to the outcome of the story 'Frank, eine Kindheit mit Vätern', the conclusion to 'Der Sohn' is one of fulfilment. Pawel's personal ambition and vanity is satisfied by the recognition he receives from his colleagues and through his work. The complete opposite of the character of Gorky's novel, Hein's Pawel shows the nature of individualism in the context of the socialist state, which itself is revealed as a compromise with the ideals and principles it set out to fulfil. The transmission of patterns of thought and behaviour from bourgeois society to socialism is laid bare in the final, self-satisfied image of Pawel's success.

The final texts which will be considered concern the nature of the relationship between the intellectual and history. Once again, this theme is of particular relevance with regard to Hein's appropriation and development of Benjamin's ideas concerning the nature and understanding of history. In this context, however, it is not so much the ideas which Benjamin puts forward in his philosophical writings which are of significance. Rather, it is the position of the philosopher as role model which sets the agenda for the prose works. In addition, the dilemmas faced by the characters of Racine and Alexander von Humboldt appear in different guises in the later prose works, where the emphasis on the figure of the historian and his impossible position in the conflict between the duty to record the past as it appears whilst at the same time working in the service of the state finds its most explicit critique in the context of the GDR.

In 'Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois', Hein opts for an earlier, historical milieu, more reminiscent of his drama than his prose. The story is set in France at the time of the absolutist monarchy of Louis XIV. In spite of its actual historical context, however, the story nevertheless reveals many elements which parallel the prevailing circumstances of the historian and intellectual in the GDR.

The mysterious malady which affects the character of the writer and historian at the court of Louis XIV, Jean Racine, in the story 'Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois' is a metaphor for the moral and intellectual crisis in which the character is enveloped. Racine's malady begins gradually after having returned from Neerwinden in Holland with the royal entourage. Here he witnessed the bestial atrocities committed by the French army in the war against the Protestant Dutch. Racine encounters the attempted



cover-up of a crime committed by three French officers, who reportedly raped a Dutch peasant woman and then murdered her and her child. The officers are accused by a neighbour, who is later also found dead in a barn, supposedly having committed suicide, an unbelievable claim given that the man was found with his body cut in half. The French commander is unsettled by the presence, on an educational trip, of the court historiographer. The soldiers nevertheless remain secure in the knowledge that their crime will go unquestioned and unpunished. This indeed proves to be the case. Racine, in spite of his revulsion at the atrocities committed, does not make the crime public. In opposition to the army, and consequently the state, Racine feels both powerless and afraid to take action:

Und schließlich, was hätte er ausrichten können. Er, ein kleiner Geschichtsschreiber, gegen die allmächtige, allgegenwärtige Armee. Nein, da sind keine Schuldgefühle, weder damals noch heute.<sup>17</sup>

Racine denies that he feels any guilt for his lack of action in the face of overwhelming odds. Instead, he attempts to rationalise his actions in terms of the compromises necessary in order to enable a person to live and function in society. His moral and emotional response is repressed. Screaming murder is the stuff of theatre, he claims, and he is no actor. No purpose is served by him revealing the crime, for, as he states, this would merely serve to undermine his own existence:

Vielleicht ist die Fähigkeit, ein Verbrechen verschweigen zu können, die Bedingung der menschlichen Rasse, in Gesellschaft zu leben. Das 'höhere Interesse' eines Staates anzuerkennen, ist bestialisch, möglicherweise aber die Voraussetzung seiner weiteren Existenz. Der des Staates, des Individuums ohnehin.<sup>18</sup>

Racine's comments on the greater interests of the state echo the sentiments of the character Kruschkatz in the novel *Horns Ende*. Indeed, there are many similarities in the relative positions of both characters in their relation to the state. Where Racine differs from Kruschkatz, however, is that his reasoning does not attempt to serve the cause of any political party or system of government. It is instead founded on the recognition of his impotence. He resigns himself to this fact through his attempt at self-justification. Nevertheless the contradiction between his conscience and his fear

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<sup>17</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois', in *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen*, pp.7-28 (p.13).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.14-15.



becomes clear when it is revealed that Racine is indeed the author behind the pamphlet 'Das Elend des Volkes', aimed at inciting the people to revolt. For the most part unoriginal, its production is nonetheless a dangerous undertaking, and one which clearly points to him, as an insider at the king's court, as the only possible author. Racine is aware, however, that his status and reputation - the invitation to the 'Grand Lever' being an outward sign of his position in society - are his best form of protection. His involvement as author of the pamphlet is a means for him to appease his conscience for having lacked the courage to reveal the crime he had witnessed, and for which he is now paying penance through his physical suffering.

If there is optimism in Racine's reflections on his life, his ageing and physical suffering and the self-denial which has cost him his happiness, then this appears in the daily hope that his pains will disappear. This hope for an alleviation of his physical suffering can be read as a metaphorical representation of Hein's own position with regard to history. It recalls Hein's conclusion to his critique of Benjamin's *Kunstwerkaufsatz* and what he regards as the inherent optimism of Benjamin's essay, and the contrasting image of the 'Angelus Novus' from the theses on history, which he takes to illustrate his opposition to the idea of progress in history. Hein nevertheless clings to the idea of redemption through history, although he does not allude to the manner in which this may occur. His position as expressed through the character of Racine remains ultimately one of hope, rather than expectation, in history, and in spite of experience, because hope remains the last of all human possibilities:

Er verkrampfte sich in der Erwartung seiner alltäglichen Schmerzen. Als er es merkt, bemüht er sich, die Verkrampfung zu lösen. Die Krankheit würde sonst heftiger und bösartiger einsetzen. Er weiß es, die Erfahrung ist der beste Arzt. Und wie immer hegt er die Hoffnung, daß ihm an diesem Tag die Qual erspart bleibt. Trotz der Erfahrung.<sup>19</sup>

In the figure of the ailing Racine, Hein takes up Benjamin's differentiation between the responsibilities of the chronicler and those of the historian, insofar as it is the responsibility of the chronicler to record the past and the role of the historian to explain it. In the case of Racine, the two figures merge, although this merger is not an intellectual position, but a recognition of the reality of the situation in which he finds himself. Racine the chronicler is plagued by a physical suffering which reflects his

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.12.

mental torments. By failing to record what he has witnessed during the French campaign in the Netherlands he has neglected to fulfil his duties as chronicler for the purpose of the writing of history. As historian to the court of Louis XIV, it is his responsibility to explain history rather than simply record it. However, the explanations which he is required to offer are compromised by his duty to the court and the king. It remains a test of his courage as an individual whether he will remain true to his duties as an historian and his responsibility to the past as a chronicler to record what he knows. Only then is there the possibility that his pains will disappear.

The final story in the collection, 'Die russischen Briefe des Jägers Johann Seifert' begins with a fictional account of the discovery of a hoard of letters from the valet of the Prussian scientist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt to his wife, which tell of the journey undertaken by Humboldt in 1829 as a guest of the Russian government to Russia and Siberia. The event to which these fictional letters relate is, by contrast, an element of historical fact. The story is presented in the form of an academic research publication, beginning with an introduction from the editor of this first edition of Seifert's letters, which outlines the history of the discovery of the letters and the difficulties surrounding their publication. From the outset, the editor is at pains to stress the various shortcomings of this edition, in particular the lack of care in the transcription of the letters. The introduction to the publication of Seifert's letters begins by explaining the lack of accuracy in the transcription of Seifert's letters as a consequence of the retirement of the person engaged in the work for the intended publication. The decision of the editor nevertheless to proceed with the publication of the letters is based on the principle that it is preferable to bring the letters to the attention of a wider audience in an imperfect form than to continue to conceal their existence:

Der mögliche Wert dieser Publikation wird durch mangelnde Sorgfalt der Umschrift erheblich eingeschränkt, so daß wir nicht mit der gewohnten Wissenschaftlichkeit überprüfte und gesicherte Historie vorlegen können. Doch da unsere langjährige Transkriptorin das Rentenalter erreichte, wir andererseits eine so wichtige Quelle wie die Seifertschen Briefe nicht einer unerfahrenen Kraft anvertrauen wollen, sehen wir uns in der Verlegenheit, einen beachtlichen Fund für Jahre zu verschweigen oder umgehend, jedoch in fragwürdiger Gestalt vorzustellen. Unsere Zentrale Forschungsstelle entschloß sich, einer

ersten, vorläufigen Publikation der Briefe zuzustimmen, die für breite Kreise von Interesse sein dürfte und der Fachwelt die Entdeckung der Briefe zumindest annonciert.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the difficulties which surround the transcription of the letters, the first edition is also incomplete, offering only twenty three of the thirty seven letters discovered behind the wallpaper of a Berlin flat. The letters, it is claimed, have been chosen on the basis of their scientific merit only. Footnotes are also absent from this edition. The reproduction of Seifert's letters for academic publication is undermined both by the form in which the letters exist and the physical difficulties inherent in their transcription. Publication of the letters therefore becomes a starting point for academic enquiry as opposed to a complete and fully researched documentation. Nevertheless, the problems inherent in the publication of these letters, according to the editor, are to some extent overcome by the extensive secondary literature already in existence which document the journey to Siberia.

Through the voice of the editor/narrator, the author Hein produces an ironic commentary on the nature and character of academic analysis of the past. The fragmentary text challenges the historical proposition that the past can be recalled for the present as completely and identically as it appeared at a moment in time. This is significant in the context of Hein's reappraisal of Benjamin's reflections on history too. For Benjamin, the task of the historian is not to record the past as a mirror of itself, bound by chronology. Rather, it is the role of the historian, as historical materialist, to hold on to and explain the past as it appears in the present at moments of crisis, when it faces the danger of incorporation into the historical text of the ruling class. The text illustrates this through the fate of the letters themselves. The historian is presented with a seemingly absurd task in trying to recover the letters from the wall of a flat in Berlin, with no guarantee that this task can ever be fulfilled. As a further, ironic comment on the nature of academic enquiry into history, the editor's preface to the letters reveals that the owner of the flat has forbidden further removal of his wallpaper in the search for additional letters, and that research is now being carried out in various other flats in the vicinity.

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<sup>20</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Die russischen Briefe des Jägers Johann Seifert', in *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen*, pp.103-181 (p.103).

The fictional account of the journey of Alexander von Humboldt to Russia continues the theme of the story 'Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois'; the problems faced by the intellectual as a subject in the absolutist state, and the conflict which arises as a result of the contradiction between the intellectual's dedication to the quest for knowledge and his duty to the state. The function of the text as a literary chronicle is more complex than the previous stories, due to the nature of the first person narrative in the form of the letter. Although the letters themselves, as a record of the journey, attempt to create the illusion of an impartial account, they are constructed around the very subjective and opinionated vision of their author. However, the actual events which the letters relate themselves serve to undermine Seifert's subjectivity and his enthusiasm to interpret and explain them. The contradictions which arise between the juxtaposition of events as recorded by Seifert and his attempts to explain them produce an unwritten account of the journey, which functions in effect as the chronicle. The deliberate undermining of a subjective narrative account by the events which the narrative itself records is a technique which Hein employs again in the novella *Drachenblut*.

The perspective from which the character and ideas of Alexander von Humboldt reveal themselves is through the account of his journey to Russia as told by his valet. Humboldt's liberalism and belief in the rationale of science stands in contrast to Seifert's rather more confused conservatism. However, Humboldt's views and opinions as they are recounted by Seifert through his narrative are not one-dimensional, but reflect the torments of the intellectual who rejects the restrictive interpretation of the natural world as imparted through religion and the church, and seeks instead to explain the human condition and the place of mankind in the natural order through the rationale of empirical analysis and scientific understanding. At the same time, he recognises the precariousness of his situation under the wilful and all-embracing power of the absolutist state. Both in his devotion to his work, to the exclusion of all other pleasures, and in his espousal of liberal causes as a consequence of his empiricism, Humboldt represents a threat to the established order. The nature of his work means that he must reject the explanations of the natural world which support and maintain the established order, in favour of a philosophy which is able to embrace other possibilities. Where his discoveries have implications which extend beyond the narrow context of scientific research and reflect a broader picture of the



human condition, Humboldt is thrown into conflict with the establishment. In a similar position to the character Racine in 'Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois', Humboldt is forced into a position of ethical compromise with authority, although unlike the former, his fate is not so directly bound to the ritual of service to the state. Nevertheless, he is not free to reveal his understanding of natural science and the human condition where this conflicts with the understanding of the state. His journey to Russia is at the invitation of the Tsar, to whose patronage he entrusts himself and his colleagues. He is obliged to give assurances that his activities on the journey to Siberia will be limited to botany and the natural world, and will not concern themselves with the human condition and in particular the state of the Russian peasantry:

So sei er durch sein Wort an den Zaren, durch die Verantwortung gegenueber seiner Thätigkeit und durch die Sorgen um die fernere Arbeith iedwedes Forschers dreifach gebunden, sich auf die tote Natur zu beschränken und Alles zu vermeiden, was sich auf MenschenEinrichtungen und vorallem die Verhältnisse der unteren VolksKlassen beziehe. Die wie immer auch einmal erworbenen Rechte der hoeheren Stände und Pflichten der Unteren zu erwehnen, wirke auf ieden Staat aufreizend und nütze Keinem.<sup>21</sup>

The influence of the state on the activities of the scientist, and the position of the scientist relative to the state are voiced in the embarrassing speech which the Reisemarschall Herr von Menschenin gives on the occasion of Humboldt's sixtieth birthday. Von Menschenin praises without irony the role of the state officials in helping the scientist make sense and order out of the chaos of his research, enabling him to utilise the results of this research for the benefit of society as a whole. The speech serves as a reminder to those present of the power and omniscient presence of the absolutist state and the duty of the scientist as an individual towards it:

Mit ueberraschenden Wendungen pries er zu guter Lezt den heilsamen und bevörderlichen Einfluss des Staatsbeamten, der aus den Zufaelligkeiten der Forschung und Erkenntniß mit ordnender Hand den Weitzen aus der Spreu suche und den eiffernden Wissenschaftler, der um einer abstracten Wahrheit willen bereit sei, alle Societät mit den Füßen zu treten, mit behutsamer Nachsicht in die Bahnen der Gesellschaft leite.<sup>22</sup>

The defence of the intellectual in Humboldt's case is through the use of irony, as he attempts to demonstrate in his speech to the Tsarevich on the conclusion of his

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.120.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp.123-124.



Russian journey, when his scientific findings are due to be revealed. Even here, considerable difficulties exist in the formulation of a speech which will serve the dual purpose of thanking the Tsar for his patronage whilst at the same time offering a veiled critique of the social conditions of many of the Russian people. Humboldt does not want to be seen to be endorsing the Russian state, yet is at the same time aware of the danger in which the voicing of criticism would place him. He is in the compromising situation of having to nurture the favour of the court and the nobility, whilst opposed to the political philosophy on which their existence is based. As his colleague Professor Rose points out, Humboldt is not unlike other great men, such as Goethe and Schelling, whose vanity craved close proximity to power. Nevertheless, he recognises that in order to achieve great things, it is necessary to have the means at one's disposal, and that these means are only to be acquired where authority and influence rests. This in turn forces the intellectual into a compromise with power if his ambitions are to be furthered:

Es sei meinem Prinzen durch diesen fatalen Ehrgeitze unmöglich gemacht, im Stillen zu wirken und sich mit dem matt glänzenden Lorbeer, den die geisthige Welth allein zu vergeben habe, zu begnügen. Darin aber, räumete er ein, sei er manchen Zeithgenossen ähnlich, die nicht die Geringsten seien. Ein Göthe, ein Schelling, sie alle seien begehrlieh, im Schatten der Macht zu sizzen, und es mag darin ein ihrem Thun Förderliches stecken. Der sich bescheidende Gaertner vermag Nüzzliches zu thun in den BlumenBeeten, doch um Berge zu modellieren, muss man sich in den Mittelpunkte der Welth stellen. Diese, der umgreifenden Thätigkeit notwendige Oeffentlichkeit, diese Wirken auf dem MarktPlazze, bedingt die Nähe zum Kompromiß, zur Politik, zur hoefischen Attitüde.<sup>23</sup>

In order to remain free of the constraint of compromise with court politics the scientist, like the gardener in Professor Rose's analogy, is condemned to relative obscurity, working in areas of little or no social significance and being denied the financial means to carry out extensive research. Indeed, the scientist who seeks to withdraw from the influence of the court is obliged to engage in deals and intrigues of a more petty nature in order to overcome smaller obstacles. A compromise therefore remains, but in a different form. The choice is between engaging in meaningful research at the expense of personal integrity, or the loss of opportunity for interesting and meaningful work.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp.134-135.

By contrast with Humboldt, Seifert reveals himself very much as a man whose character is moulded by the prejudices of his times. At the centre of Seifert's philosophy is the belief in a Christian God and the biblical explanation of man's place in the universe. His God-fearing nature expresses itself in a form of intellectual arrogance which refuses to accept the possibility of any other explanation of the natural world. This arrogance betrays itself in his understanding of science and botany, which is as limited as it is disinterested. On an excursion to collect plant samples from the Russian Steppes, Seifert dismisses the merit of the undertaking, claiming with confidence that he could locate the same plants in the fields behind Berlin's Tiergarten or amongst the Köpenick heather. His refusal to comment on this lies in the rather conceited desire not to hurt Herr Ehrenberg's professional pride.

On the question of marriage and the raising of children, Seifert's religious beliefs place mankind in an unchangeable relationship with God and the church. By contrast, Humboldt's arguments betray an historical understanding which is based on the scientific rationale of the evolutionary nature of human society. His anthropological approach to understanding the institution of marriage reveals it to be a changeable, social construction, not an historical constant, as would be the case if marriage were the work of God. Humboldt blames marriage for further restricting the limited freedom of individuals and binding them together in even greater misery:

Nein, er sei durchaus kein Freund dieser Einrichtung, die von den wenigen Freiheiten des Menschen weitere hinweg nimmt und das moegliche Gluek des Individuums in ein gefestigtes UnGluek verwandle.<sup>24</sup>

The steadfastness of Seifert's faith in God and his belief that alternative explanations of the nature of the world are misguided express themselves in more sinister ways when concerned with the question of race. Seifert is an anti-Semite, whose hatred of the Jews reflects the prevailing religious and political attitudes of his time. His justification for his anti-Semitism is based on information which he has read in state newspapers and which he again accepts without question, and a religious prejudice which reflects the bigotry of the church as an institution. In a letter to his wife, Seifert exhorts her not to borrow money from the Jew Rafaelson if at all possible, and to try

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.147.

to find a good German or a Christian from whom to borrow instead. In a previous letter Seifert expresses his fear that his wife would be seduced by Rafaelson in his absence. He stubbornly believes the propaganda of the Prussian establishment against the Jews, claiming them to be enemies of the state, child murderers and otherwise vile and untrustworthy. His blind conviction in these matters is such that he refuses to allow Humboldt to convince him otherwise, indeed he intends to make Humboldt see the error of his ways in defending the Jews:

Gumplot ist in diesem Punkte sehr wunderlich. Er glaubt selbst die KinderMorde und Greuelthaten der Juden nicht, wiewohl sie in aller Munde und von den StaatsBlättern berichtetserstattet sind.<sup>25</sup>

Humboldt argues at length against Seifert's bigotry and prejudice, attempting to explain how anti-Semitism is the product of the inability of the average person to accept their own faults, failings and misfortunes, which are then blamed on the Jews or other minorities in society. In order to prove themselves as loyal subjects of the state, they must sacrifice themselves in the name of the state, as an admission of their guilt and by way of atonement. In this way, the state is able to place the blame for its own shortcomings on others, thus preserving the illusion of its own integrity and its *raison d'être*, at the expense of reason:

Das heilige Vaterland, die heilige Idee, der vergötterte Herrscher erfordern die Kreuzigung. Ein Mensch, eine Minderheit muss für das heillose Vaterland sterben, damit diese seine UnThaten, seine Schuld erklären könne. Als Schuld des Anderen. Immer seien die auf diese Weise schuldig gesprochenen, seien es die Frauen, die Juden, die Gelehrten, die NichtNormalen, immer heißen sie daher schmutzig, schmierig, unrein. So erhebe sich das MittelMass. Es denunziere, um unbeflekt zu sein. Es schlage die Frau, um männlich zu werden. Es trete den Ausländer, um sich als Herr zu erheben. Es denunziere die Vernunft, um seinen gesunden Geisth darzuthun.<sup>26</sup>

Humboldt's attack on prejudice and racism, which are institutionalised in the absolutist state, shows the historical link to attitudes and ideas which continue to survive in the present. The examples he gives are a reminder of the author's concerns in the novel *Horns Ende*, where the prejudice which existed as a part of socialisation under the National Socialist dictatorship finds its way into the fabric of GDR society. The reason for the existence of prejudice, as Humboldt reveals, is the inability and

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.137.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.139.

unwillingness at an individual and an institutional level to deal with failings or misfortune, or to engage in self-analysis and criticism. Against this, the act of remembering is encouraged as a means of re-engaging the past in a dialogue with the present, in an attempt to liberate the past from an understanding of history which seeks only to justify the present.

Seifert's letters illuminate other sides to his character, however, which show that he does not blindly accept all aspects of life in the absolutist state. He reveals himself as an emotional man, in contrast with Humboldt's rational intellect, not only during the course of his conversations with the latter, but also by his reactions to the conditions of human life he witnesses on the journey through Russia. His prejudices are re-affirmed in a visit to a Buddhist religious ceremony, which reminds him of the words of the pastor of his local church, who had described to his congregation in graphic detail the blasphemous nature of this kind of religious practice. Nevertheless, the manner in which the Kalmucks live impresses him. A limited form of local democracy has emerged, which allows them to elect a mayor and other officials, and to pass local laws. The peasants are free and live peaceful and contented lives:

Ansonsten sind die Kalmuekken ruhige und friedliche Bauern, die im Zarenreich ihr Auskommen finden. Man lässt sie ungeschoren für sich leben, ihre Bürgermeister wählen sie allerorten selbst, ebenso die Gerichte und anderen StandesPersonen.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, total freedom and autonomy is withheld from them. Elected local representatives are still subordinate to a Russian police inspector, whose duty it is to ensure that the limited local democracy enjoyed by the Kalmucks does not lead to a demand for greater freedom and autonomy. Seifert finds this arrangement desirable, believing that one of the functions of the state is to protect the people from the excesses of their own nature, at which point he cites the French Revolution as an example of the dangers of allowing freedom and liberty with no restraints:

Lediglich ein russischer PolizeiInspector, dem jede Standes= und AmtsPerson der Kalmuekken unterstellt ist, vertritt hier die OberHoheit Nicolaus I. und achtete darauf, dass nicht Uebermuth oder LeichtGläubigkeit die Kalmuekken verführet, und ihre

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp.130-131.



By contrast, Seifert is shocked by the condition of the serfs in the Siberian mines. They are held captive like animals, trading the gold they mine against the basic necessities for sustaining life in the presence of armed Cossacks. Seifert's emotional response to the spectacle of the serfs in the mines shows little comprehension of the dangers associated with the expression of opinions critical of the state. He displays an attitude which regards the state as a fundamentally benevolent body. The conditions under which the serfs exist are therefore both surprising and shocking for Seifert. His response causes alarm for Humboldt, who is aware that expressing a critical opinion or showing an unfavourable reaction to conditions of life in the Russian Empire could place the whole of their journey in jeopardy. Where Seifert's reaction is emotional and instinctive, Humboldt's is educated and diplomatic. No less disgusted than his valet by what he sees, Humboldt subtly conceals his abhorrence by pointing out that the Russian government's only interest is to further the cause of science, which in turn alludes to the real purpose of the mines, namely to enhance the military capability of the state. The broader perspective which Humboldt's education gives him is absent from the instinctive analysis and response of Seifert.

The instinctive trust which Seifert places in institutions of the state is also evident in his claim to have noticed in many intellectuals an over-exaggerated fear of the police. He is unable to recognise the challenge to the establishment which the work of the free intellectual could potentially represent, and is surprised when Humboldt is alarmed by the content of one of his letters, containing details about comments Humboldt has made in relation to Prussian heads of state, including the king himself. Humboldt explains at some length the difficulties which confront the intellectual in his relationship with the state; the constant observation, interception, reading and copying of letters, and the binding assurances to various heads of state that his research will be confined to the science of the natural world. His situation demonstrates the mechanics of authoritarianism, the use of censorship and the secret police, and the contradictions and paranoia which are inherent in the nature and structure of the state itself.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.131.



To some extent, however, Humboldt is protected from the machinations of the state by his rank and status. This allows him the luxury of expressing certain sentiments in his private correspondence which are in keeping with his character and his points of view. His reputation is such that the voicing of radical attitudes and ideas is to some degree expected of him. Indeed, more dangerous for him would be silence, which would raise the suspicion that he was in some way attempting to conceal his true beliefs and motives:

Man werde ihm den Jacobiner in seiner PrivatCorrespondenz nicht veruebeln, solange er dem Hof seinen KatzBukkel nicht versagt; ein wenig FreiGeistherey sei erlaubt, wo die Epauletten correct sizzzen. Gewichtiger aber seien in dieser Chose die Annotationen eines eingestandenen Spizzels, der ihm gegenueber recht freimüthig aeusserte, dass allein der frivole Gedanke, die umstürzlerische Idee, die ausgesprochene oder scribirte Insubordination das betreffende Individuum wenig gefährlich erscheinen lasse, ja, fast unverdächtig, und nur mit der untersten, quasi leichtesten polizeilichen Observation bedacht werden muss. Anders aber iener, der sich weder oeffentlich noch privatim beklage; hier müsse gesucht und aufgeforscht werden, in welche möglicherweise bösen Ekken er seine wahren Ansichten trägt und mit wem und worüber er heimlich raisonirt.<sup>29</sup>

Again the text brings to the fore the dilemma of the intellectual in the authoritarian state. Parallels between Humboldt's description of the absolutist Prussian state and the more contemporary situation for the writer and intellectual in the GDR are clearly invited, as the fictional past takes on an allegorical function for the present.

Seifert's attitude towards the authority of the state is challenged, however, when he is approached by the police through the person of Herr von Menschenin to act as an informer against Humboldt. A conflict of loyalties arises between his responsibilities towards Humboldt and his obligations to the state. Although initially reluctant to comply with von Menschenin's requests, Seifert is placed under increasing pressure and given different incentives to supply information on Humboldt. Ultimately, he receives the direct threat of being forced to remain in Russia if he remains unwilling to accede to the demands:

Ich zittherte am gantzen Leibe und beruhigte mich den langen Tag ueber nicht. Der gleichen schäßigen Verpflichtung war ich in Berlin mit einigem Gluck entgangen, aber hier sehe ich keinen leichten Weg. Wenn ich nicht die Absicht trage, in St. Petersburg zu verbleiben, und

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.121.

ich will es keinen Tag ueber die nothwendige Zeith, soll ich den JudasBrief schreiben. Mich meinem Princen zu eroeffnen, wage ich nicht.<sup>30</sup>

Eventually Seifert gives way to pressure and writes the report which is asked of him. His position is made easier for him by Humboldt, who recognises the immense difficulties of the situation in which his valet has been placed. Seifert nevertheless falls short of recognising the true nature of the system in which von Menschenin has the influence to arbitrarily control his life. Instead, he chooses to lay the blame on the individual, von Menschenin, as opposed to the nature of the authority he represents. It is left for Humboldt to explain the nature of bureaucracy and officialdom in the authoritarian state, which allows the likes of von Menschenin to enforce his own prejudices and beliefs behind the shallow facade of public service:

Zumal in den absolutistisch regierten Staaten seien diese Kröten gefährlich, da sie ihr giftiges Maul dort verkleiden und masciren und allerlei moralische, politische und schöngeistige Vorwände zur Hand haben, um ihre privatesten Gefühle abladen zu können. Wahre Critic und selbst Censur sei, wie immer, offen und somit beredbar, wenn nur die Gesellschaft bei sich selbst und das notwendige StaatsUebel nicht aufgebläht, sondern ein schmiegsames Tuch um dem Leib des Volkes sei. Doch eine sich selbst mißverstehende Regierung bedarf der Phrase, und wenn eine politische Diktatur genügend praktische Floskeln entwickelt habe, lasse sich hinter diesen iedweder Unrath verbergen.<sup>31</sup>

The ultimate irony, from Seifert's point of view, is that the letters he sends contain the information which the state police require, and have their penultimate destination in the archives of the offices of the secret police.

The various themes which appear in the story 'Die russischen Briefe des Jägers Johann Seifert' reflect once again the author's concerns with historical understanding and the role of the historian in the authoritarian state. The story itself represents a further variation in the style of the literary chronicle, by which genre Hein defines his work. Indeed, the stories from the collection *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen*, which have formed the basis of the discussion in this chapter, can be considered as miniature studies of the themes which Hein takes up and expands upon in his later GDR prose fiction. The following chapters will consider these works with regard to their relation

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.157.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.179.

to the literary chronicle and the understanding of history which this reveals. They will be discussed in chronological order of publication in the GDR.

## Chapter 3

### Drachenblut

The novella *Drachenblut* was the first of Hein's longer prose works to be published in the GDR. It is set in the GDR of the early 1980s, and takes the form of a first person narrative. In stark contrast to the majority of texts written in the GDR and elsewhere by male authors, Claudia, the narrator of the text, is female. A forty year old doctor, she represents at a superficial level the conventional image of the career woman in modern society. Successful in her work, attractive, and financially independent, she symbolises the realisation of a political and social philosophy, namely the liberated, independent, socialist individual.

The narrative spans a period of approximately one and a half years, from the beginning of Claudia's relationship with Henry, an architect and neighbour in the block of apartment flats where she lives, to the time six months after Henry's death. Within this closed time period, however, Claudia has occasion to reflect upon other painful and repressed memories from her past, in particular her adolescent relationship with her school friend Katharina and the events which lead to its end.

Stylistically, the narrative is part diaristic, part confessional. Events are either recorded without explanation or additional commentary or, where explanation is offered, it is subordinated to the logic of Claudia's own subjective, narratorial position. It is the impersonal, detached style of Claudia's narrative, however, which creates the tension in the text, between statement and implication, and between the written and the unwritten word. It is a similar stylistic device to that used by Hein in the story 'Die russischen Briefe des Jägers Johann Seifert', although Claudia's narrative does not take the form of a one sided correspondence. Its relation to the literary chronicle lies once more in the manner in which the elements of the text combine to undermine the subjective narrative account. The facts related through Claudia's narrative stand in contrast to the explanations she offers. Her story is one of repression of past memories and present problems. Nevertheless, the effect which the contrast between recording and explanation creates in Claudia's account alludes to an unwritten narrative from which the truth concerning her past can be derived.

The central theme of the text concerns the relation between individual and social identity, and the manner in which social identity is moulded by history. The nature of social identity is influenced by socialisation, the generally accepted definition for which is given by Klaus Jürgen Tillmann in *Sozialisationstheorien* as:

[...] der Prozeß der Entstehung und Entwicklung der Persönlichkeit in wechselseitiger Abhängigkeit von der gesellschaftlich vermittelten sozialen und materiellen Umwelt. Vorrangig thematisch ist dabei [...], wie sich der Mensch zu einem gesellschaftlich handlungsfähigen Subjekt bildet.<sup>1</sup>

However, the text also reveals the specific manner in which concrete, historical events affect and influence individual lives at a personal level. From the personal perspective of Claudia's narrative, the historical and political dimension of the text emerges. It is through the juxtaposition of the subjective narrative account and the events which the narrative records that the chronicle of contemporary GDR society is written.

In the novel *Kindheitsmuster*, published in 1979, Christa Wolf posed the question 'wie sind wir geworden, wie wir heute sind?'<sup>2</sup> The theme of identity which Wolf's novel sought to investigate focused specifically on the influence of National Socialist socialisation and its influence across the generations within the context of GDR society. Wolf's novel adds to the reception of *Drachenblut* in that it creates a literary context for Hein's novella, as well as a point of reference in relation to the questions which Hein's text raises. There are similarities between both texts, particularly when considering the ninth chapter of *Drachenblut*, which records Claudia's return to the town 'G' where she spent her early childhood and adolescence. This chapter represents in miniature a literary re-working of Wolf's narrator's journey to Landsberg an der Warthe in an attempt to rediscover and requestion her past. Whereas the narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* deliberately attempts to confront her past, in order to attempt to understand the nature of her own identity, Claudia's narrative in *Drachenblut* works to the opposite effect. Claudia's narrative is one of repression and conformity, incorporating a philosophy which is so extremely rational that it begins to work against itself. It aims at self-vindication, and to this extent any emotional

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<sup>1</sup> Klaus Jürgen Tillmann, *Sozialisationstheorien* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1989), p.10.

<sup>2</sup> Christa Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster* (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1976), pp.248-276.



weakness on her part is repressed as part of a self-protecting mechanism which enables her to avoid confrontation with her fears. Hers is a model of social evolution along Darwinist lines, where survival and success are dependent upon the ability to respond dispassionately and mechanically to the demands of a given situation. Claudia uncharacteristically departs from the rational language of her narrative and uses the poetic metaphors of myth and legend to describe her reaction to crisis:

Ich bin auf alles eingerichtet, ich bin gegen alles gewappnet, mich wird nichts mehr verletzen. Ich bin unverletzlich geworden. Ich habe in Drachenblut gebadet, und kein Lindenblatt ließ mich irgendwo schutzlos. Aus dieser Haut komme ich nicht mehr heraus.<sup>3</sup>

The journey to 'G' and the resulting confrontation with the past is subconsciously motivated by Claudia's alienation in the present. Her difficulties in attempting to identify with the place on a superficial level are exacerbated by the change to the physical environment. However, the recollection of the betrayal of her closest friend, Katharina, and their adolescent rites of passage, serves not only as the key to the unravelling of Claudia's own repressed personality, but reveals also the concealed, historical narrative through which an explanation of the text can commence.

As is the case with Claudia's personal memories of her friendship with Katharina, the historical background to Claudia's personal trauma has likewise been repressed. However, the historical text comes to light again through Claudia's involuntary act of remembering, which is inspired by the ill-fated attempt to regain the comfortable memories of her past. This significance of this episode in terms of Hein's understanding of history and its portrayal through the literary chronicle is particularly poignant when considered in the context of the ideas expressed by Benjamin in the fifth proposition of the theses on history, and is central to the understanding of the text. For Benjamin, the past reveals itself suddenly, as a picture, and must be grasped as it appears in the present. The picture of the past is in danger of disappearing at every moment in the present which does not recognise itself in this picture:

Das wahre Bild der Vergangenheit *huscht* vorbei. Nur als Bild, das auf Nimmerwiedersehen im Augenblick seiner Erkennbarkeit eben aufblitzt, ist die Vergangenheit festzuhalten. 'Die Wahrheit wird uns nicht davonlaufen' - dieses Wort, das von Gottfried Keller stammt, bezeichnet im Geschichtsbild des Historismus genau die Stelle, an der es vom historischen Materialismus durchschlagen wird. Denn es ist ein unwiederbringliches Bild der

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<sup>3</sup> *Drachenblut*, p.172. [Further references are given after quotations in the text]

Vergangenheit, das mit jeder Gegenwart zu verschwinden droht, die sich nicht als in ihm gemeint erkannte.<sup>4</sup>

The solitary act of remembering becomes an act of liberation of the past. Claudia's recollections produce a chronicle of the past, in which history is recorded as it appears, in the present, without explanation. The past is no longer repressed by the historical narrative of the 'victors', through which it becomes subject to the ideological imperatives of authority. Instead, it is allowed the opportunity, through Claudia's narrative voice, to speak for itself. It is the resulting narrative which then invites explanation and interpretation, through which the significance of the past in all its moments is made clear. The role of the historical materialist in Benjamin's analysis, whose responsibility it becomes to provide this interpretation, is rejected by Claudia at the end of her recollections, as she consciously and deliberately denies the validity of her memory in an attempt once more to repress the past. Instead, it is the reader who is invited to offer the interpretation which will explain the link between Claudia's past and her life in the present, and the historical causes of her alienation.

The earliest reviews and criticism of the novella in the GDR appeared in 1983. Reaction to the novella was sufficient to provoke a series of six essays in *Weimarer Beiträge*, under the title 'Für und wider "Der fremde Freund" von Christoph Hein'.<sup>5</sup> In a manner reminiscent of Peter Hacks' speech to commemorate Hein's award of the Heinrich-Mann-Preis in 1982, the critics praised Hein for his style and literary technique, before drawing attention to what they perceived to be the subjective misrepresentation of the context of his work.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the reviews which appeared in West German newspapers and literary magazines, which read the novella as a realistic portrayal of alienation in a modern, industrial society, GDR criticism in the main focused its attention on what it considered to be the questionable realism of the portrayal of the main character, Claudia, and the lack of objectivity which the narratorial perspective created. Equally, it questioned the ability of the author to take

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<sup>4</sup> 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', p.695.

<sup>5</sup> Rüdiger Bernhard, Klaus Kändler, Bernd Leistner, Gabriele Lindner, Bernd Schick, Ursula Wilke, 'Für und Wider. "Der fremde Freund" von Christoph Hein', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 29 (1983), no.9, 1635-1655.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Hacks, 'Heinrich-Mann-Preis 1982 (Laudatio auf Christoph Hein)', *Neue deutsche Literatur* 30, 6 (1982), 159-163.

into account society's potential for development and change, a central element to political, historical and literary understanding in the GDR.

One of the contributors to the debate in *Weimarer Beiträge*, Rüdiger Bernhardt, recognised and was disturbed by the extent of public sympathy for and identification with the main character and narrator. The manner in which Claudia's account of her life, and the lives of the other characters with whom she has contact, is unable to extend beyond her own experience and evaluation, brings him to describe her narratorial position as 'un-historical'. This, he claims, is proven to be the case when Claudia holds civilisation responsible for the degeneration of humanity. He criticises the narrative perspective which fails to see the potential for social development and progress, and which consequently stands in opposition to the fundamental principles of GDR Marxism-Leninism.

Similar criticism is made by Bernd Schick in the same collection of essays. He claims that the author does not succeed in bringing together in the character of Claudia the idea of society as a product of history, progressing and developing along the way, and the direct experience of history through participation in society. The result, according to Schick, is that Claudia's character becomes one-dimensional and reinforces social clichés rather than challenges them.

The nature of the criticism which Hein's novella received in these essays reveals the continuity of a doctrinaire approach to literary criticism in the GDR in the 1980s, which is still tainted by the influence of the literary concepts of Georg Lukács from the 1950s. This approach is summarised by Ursula Wilke:

Die Novelle hätte eben als Ganzes über die in ihr dargestellte Individualität hinaus ein Quantum mehr Totalität heranholen müssen, um ein literarischer Wurf zu werden, der uns bereichert und weiterhilft.<sup>7</sup>

The caution which these critics display in their appraisal of Hein's text is equally evident in Brigitte Böttcher's essay: 'Diagnose eines unheilbaren Zustandes. Christoph Hein: *Der fremde Freund*', which appeared in the same year as the 'Für und wider' series. Böttcher's main difficulty with the text lies also with the subjective

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<sup>7</sup> Ursula Wilke, 'Für und Wider. "Der fremde Freund" von Christoph Hein', p.1653.

nature of the narrative, which, in her opinion, shows the lack of a dialectic approach to the problems which the text confronts:

Heins Novelle verkürzt in ihrer Zuspitzung den Blickwinkel auf die Problematik, da findet Fatalismus Raum, mit der vereinfachten Sicht Claudias auch undialektisches Betrachten der Entwicklungswidersprüche.<sup>8</sup>

Two years after publication, and undoubtedly influenced by the publicity and success which the book enjoyed, critical opinion towards the novella in the GDR became more favourable. In a round table discussion on the subject of the development of GDR literature, published in *Weimarer Beiträge*, the critic Dieter Schlenstedt saw the novella as part of a literary genre which he termed 'sozialistischer kritischer Realismus'.<sup>9</sup> This attempt to incorporate the novella into a new category of literary production, however, merely serves to further illustrate the difficulties which the critics experienced when dealing with the text. The attempt to include the novella as part of a socialist literary genre can be regarded as an attempt to claim it for the literary establishment, and as such to diminish the confrontational potential of the text.

From a West German critical perspective, Bernd Fischer draws attention to the challenge which the novella represents to the concept of literary production in the GDR:

Heins [...] Kritiker fühlen sich zurecht in ihrem Literaturverständnis angegriffen. Denn Heins Realismus arbeitet mit der Künstlichkeit des Experiments.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst Hein's stylistic approach may be radical in the context of literary understanding in the GDR, it nevertheless falls short of the formal experimentation associated with modern literary movements in the West. Claudia's first person narrative is far removed from the modernist interior monologue. Indeed, even in a GDR literary context the novella does not emulate the radical narrative style of Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*, where the nature of language is inextricably linked to the question of

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<sup>8</sup> Brigitte Böttcher, 'Diagnose eines unheilbaren Zustandes. Christoph Hein *Der fremde Freund*', *Neue deutsche Literatur* 31, 6 (1983), 145-149.

<sup>9</sup> Horst Haase, et. al., 'DDR-Literaturentwicklung in der Diskussion. Rundtischgespräch', *Weimarer Beiträge* 30, 10 (1984), 1589-1616 (p.1605).

<sup>10</sup> Bernd Fischer, *Christoph Hein. Drama und Prosa im letzten Jahrzehnt der DDR* (Heidelberg: Winter; Reihe Siegen, 1990) vol. 98, p.69.



individual identity. Hein's novella works within the confines of realism, except for the introductory dream sequence. His analysis of society does not take language as its focal point or beginning. Instead, social reality is portrayed as a function and product of history, psychology and language. Language is a means of portraying reality, and at the same time operates as a product of that reality. Language *in extremis* does not break down in the sense that it collapses into nonsense. Rather, it falls into silence. As such, the historical narrative, as a construct of language, disappears into silence as a result of its repression. The concluding paragraph of the opening dream sequence of the novella, which introduces the *leitmotifs* of fear and repression, demonstrates the function of language in conjunction with this analysis of social reality:

Später, viel später der Versuch einer Rekonstruktion. Wiederherstellung eines Vorgangs. Erhoffte Annäherung. Um zu greifen, um zu begreifen. Ungewiß bleibt seine Beschaffenheit. Ein Traum. Oder ein fernes Erinnern. Ein Bild, mir unerreichbar, letztlich unverständlich. Dennoch vorhanden und beruhigend in dem Namenlosen, Unerklärlichen, das ich auch bin. Schließlich vergeht der Wunsch. Vorbei. Die überwirkliche Realität, meine alltäglichen Abziehbilder schieben sich darüber, bunt, laut, vergeßlich. Heilsam. Und nur der Schrecken, die ausgestandene Hilflosigkeit bleibt in mir, unfäßbar, unauslöschlich. (pp.6-7)

The dream sequence itself offers conventional images of fear and repression; an abyss which must be crossed via an old, ruined bridge, apprehension, yet no possibility of turning back. The images are made all the more poignant by their juxtaposition with the confident image of the single-mindedness and fearlessness of the five athletic young men, all similarly attired in white shorts and shirts with a runic design. The runners appear as one, working together like a machine, crossing the bridge with ease. The background also creates a contrast with the opening images of fear. The calm tranquillity of the cypress green creates a pace for the text which changes after the image of the ruined bridge. Appearing at the beginning of the novella, the dream sequence operates as a key to the text. As the final paragraph reveals, the attempt by the narrator to uncover the meaning and significance of the dream is unsuccessful, as the psychological operation of repression masks the disturbing images of the dream. The fear which the narrator encounters in the dream, however, remains.

The metaphors of the dream sequence invite interpretations which focus on the psychological perspective of the mechanics of fear and repression and also on the broader context of historical understanding. The passage of the narrator and companion is itself a time sequence running from past to future, described in the



narratorial space of the present. The bridge over the abyss which, when approached, appears as a ruin, represents the difficulty which the narrator and her companion face in moving from present time towards the future. The present is itself a physical manifestation of a break between past and future time. What appeared from a distance to be conjunctive - the symbol of the bridge offering a passage between background and foreground - proves to be disjunctive, a ruin. The possibility of linkage remains, however the route for the narrator and her companion as opposed to the five 'mechanical' runners is precarious. The symbol of the five runners is important in this respect too. Their movement across this time space is mechanical, functional and predetermined. They function like automatons. The bridge, described by the narrator as 'our bridge', proves no obstacle to the runners. It exists only for the narrator and her companion. The runners are representative of an ideology, as the symbol on their shirts would indicate, which recognises no obstacle between the past and the future, and which progresses remorselessly and without constraint towards this future goal. Their movement is inaudible however, and therefore appears unreal: 'Ein tonloser Auftritt.' (p.6) The obstacle, as it is represented, is a human obstacle. It is personalised in its description as 'our bridge', and recognised only by those for whom the ideology of progress and progression from the past to the future has become questionable or meaningless. The recognition of the obstacle is in itself dangerous, however, as survival, in the dream context, is bought by conformity to the demands of ideology. Nevertheless, the inevitable passage of time means that the narrator and her companion are forced to continue their journey:

Wir könnten weitergehen. Oder doch besser zurück. Aber für uns gibt es keine Umkehr, wir müssen zur gegenüberliegenden Seite. Und es ist aussichtsloser geworden. (p.6)

As the image of the runners fades into nothing it is replaced by sound, and a normality of sorts is restored. The runners act as a warning to doubters that conformity is the price to be paid for survival. Finally, the image is repressed and the present regained. The uneasiness of the image, however, leaves its trace on the subconscious memory in the form of fear.

In 'Surface and Depth: Christoph Hein's *Drachenblut*', David Roberts emphasises the psychological interpretation of the dream sequence and the resulting dialectic of Claudia's narrative through the implicit and the explicit nature of the text:

The dream, which opens the novella and itself thematizes surface and depth (bridge and abyss), signals the need to distinguish between the manifest and the latent content of the first-person narrative.<sup>11</sup>

He argues for a reading of the text which is based on the polarisation of the elements of surface and depth. This bi-polarity can, according to Roberts, be seen in the role of Claudia as the narratorial observer as opposed to the subject, where surface is indicative of the former and depth of the latter.

Claudia, however, rejects the need for psychiatry and psychoanalysis as a means of entering once more into a dialogue with the past. She accepts the psychological function of repression as a universal fact. Moreover, she recognises the value of its function in enabling mankind to consciously ignore dangers which might otherwise bring about its destruction:

Was soll es helfen, Verdrängungen bewußt zu machen. Verdrängungen sind das Ergebnis einer Abwehr, das Sichwehren gegen eine Gefahr. Sie sollen dem Organismus helfen zu existieren. Ein Lebewesen versucht zu überstehen, indem es verschiedene Dinge, die es umbringen könnten, nicht wahrnimmt. Ein heilsamer, natürlicher Mechanismus. Wozu diese Leichen ausgraben, mit denen man ohnehin nicht leben kann. Schließlich, die gesamte Zivilisation ist eine Verdrängung. Das Zusammenleben von Menschen war nur zu erreichen, indem bestimmte Gefühle und Triebe unterdrückt wurden. Erst eine Menschheit, die in ihrer Gesamtheit den Psychiater benötigt oder vielmehr: benötigen würde, war fähig, in Gemeinschaft zu leben. Diese Unterdrückung erbrachte das, was wir den zivilisierten Menschen nennen. (p.96)

For Claudia, the repression of memory is a useful psychological function which helps her overcome overpowering experiences and feelings of hurt and humiliation. According to her analysis, however, the result of this repression is that rationality and civilisation have been bought at the cost of a more profound relationship with the self. Civilisation condemns mankind to superficiality: 'Wir haben uns auf der Oberfläche eingerichtet. Eine Beschränkung, die uns Vernunft und Zivilisation gebieten.' (p.97) Claudia's understanding of civilisation as a product of the psychological function of repression is founded on a limited, pseudo-scientific perspective. Ironically, her final response is to reject her considerations altogether: 'Im übrigen ist es ohne Belang. Mein Desinteresse daran ist der wirksamste Schutz.' (p.98)

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<sup>11</sup> David Roberts, 'Surface and Depth: Christoph Hein's *Drachenblut*', *The Germanic Quarterly* 63, 3/4 (1990), 478-489 (p.480).

A distinction is also drawn by Claudia between medicine and psychology, between the mechanics of the body as a physical entity and its mental operations. As a doctor, she claims her duty and interest lies with the physical condition of humanity. At the same time, she rejects the idea that there is a solution for 'real' problems, by which she means problems which fall into the domain of the psychological or the spiritual. Indeed, she distances herself from the idea that psychology and psychiatry are in any way connected with medicine:

Ich bin an irgendwelchen Abgründen und Schicksalen von Menschen nicht interessiert. Dazu habe ich zu viel zu tun, mit mir, mit meiner Arbeit. Ich kann Tabletten verschreiben und Spritzen geben. Der Rest ist nicht Sache der Medizin. Ich bin kein Beichtpriester, ich verabreiche nicht Trost. [...] Zu lösen sind wirkliche Probleme ohnehin nicht. Man schleppt sie sein Leben lang mit sich herum, sie sind das Leben, und irgendwie stirbt man auch an ihnen. (p.95)

Claudia's refusal to consider the problems of mankind beyond those of the physical condition of the body is again a representation of fear and repression. In her attempts to justify the distinctions she makes between her understanding of medical practice and the incurable problems of the soul, she forces her argument to the point where she contradicts the very ethos and history of her own profession. She likens attempts to deal with the mental sufferings of mankind with that of medical experimentation on a terminally ill patient. Experimentation is futile, according to Claudia, prolonging only the patient's suffering whilst sustaining them with unrealistic hope:

Wenn ich an einem unheilbar Kranken herumexperimentiere, erniedrige ich ihn zum Versuchstier. Er wird ohne mich auch sterben, aber leichter, unangestrengter. Er muß dann weniger Energien in unsinnigen Hoffnungen verbrauchen. (p.95)

Her defence of the dignity of the patient demonstrates at the same time a profound despair which rejects the idea of progress, and in this context particularly progress through science, as meaningless in relation to the life of the individual. At the same time, however, it negates the idea of progress through history behind which Claudia attempts to conceal her fears, protecting her as it does from the contrasting reality of her own experience for the price of her conformity and silence.

As Jens-F. Dwars points out, Claudia's analysis of civilisation as the product or consequence of repression, appears in the chapter preceding the account of the visit to

'G'.<sup>12</sup> The events which she recalls on her visit to 'G' offer the explanations for the cause of her alienation. In contrast to the previous chapter in which Claudia rejects psychoanalysis, the ninth chapter is, in essence, a psychoanalytic unravelling of the events of her past and the involuntary recall of repressed memory:

Doch entgegen der demonstrativen Absage an die Freudsche Therapie [...] geht das folgende Kapitel in geradezu klassischer Psychoanalyse an die Wurzeln eines Traumas, in dem Claudia in die Stadt ihrer Kindheit zurückkehrt.<sup>13</sup>

The ninth chapter is constructed in two parts. The first part concerns Claudia's attempt to try to reaffirm the existence of a material framework around which her repressed memory of the past can continue to support her in the present. The second part deals with Claudia's reflections, alone in her hotel bedroom, on the loss of this constructed past, and reveals the story she has been attempting to suppress.

There is no particular motive, Claudia claims, for her decision to go to 'G', other than wishing to spend her two days' holiday away from Berlin. However, her inability to say why she wanted to visit 'G' alludes to the trauma of her childhood, the memory of which remains with her in spite of her attempts to suppress it:

Warum ich nach G. fahren wollte, kann ich nicht sagen. Ich habe dort meine Kindheit verbracht. Als ich vierzehn Jahre alt war, zogen meine Eltern um. Seitdem war ich nie wieder in dieser Stadt gewesen. (p.106)

Claudia's friend Henry is also sceptical of her motives for visiting the town. Her reluctance to invite him, followed by a sudden change of mind, leads him to question whether she is afraid of awakening the ghosts of her past. This light-hearted remark conceals the fact that Henry is aware of the possible motivation behind her desire to visit the town of her childhood once more, although the exact details of her past are not known to him. He later advises her against making the journey because he considers it to be a futile, not to say harmful undertaking. For Henry, the past is repressed and dislocated from the present. He refuses to recognise that it has a significant role to play in determining the events of the future:

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<sup>12</sup> Jens-F. Dwars, 'Hoffnung auf ein Ende. Allegorien kultureller Erfahrung in Christoph Heins Novelle *Der fremde Freund*', in *Text + Kritik* 111, pp.6-15.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.11.



Er riet mir, in irgendeine Stadt zu fahren, nur nicht nach 'G'. Er sagte etwas von einem unbedachten Weg zurück in ein überholtes Vorher und daß mir das nicht helfen könne. Ich sagte, ich wolle es mir nur ansehen, meine Erinnerungen überprüfen, nicht mehr. (p.106)

In Henry's case, the sense of detachment which the dislocation of the past from the present brings about manifests itself in the hedonistic quest for excitement and danger, together with an abdication of responsibility.

During the journey to 'G', Claudia provides anecdotes from her childhood. They are harmless memories, which protect her from having to face the more dangerous and disturbing ones which threaten to undermine her. It is Henry who asks her to talk about her past, and the opportunity this presents to reinforce the innocent recollections from her childhood has a cathartic effect upon her. The light-hearted atmosphere in the car on the way to 'G' relieves her of the necessity and obligation she previously felt to explain herself and her actions. The mood changes rapidly when they arrive in 'G'. The physical presence of the town makes Claudia apprehensive. She becomes increasingly garrulous in an attempt to overcome her trepidation. Moreover, as the account of the visit to 'G' progresses, the town increasingly becomes a symbol of rejection for her. She discovers her trivial memories of the past no longer coincide with the present. Her attempts to re-establish a contact with her past on a superficial basis fail, in spite of the fact that the town has, in essence, remained the same:

Am Nachmittag liefen wir durch das Städtchen. Alles war klein, viel kleiner, als ich es in Erinnerung hatte. Dennoch, es schien mir unverändert. Selbst die verblaßte Schrift über dem Lebensmittelladen gegenüber der alten Schule behauptete sich noch immer gegen Wetterunbilden und den Gang der Geschichte: Colonialwaren, Südfrüchte, Importe. (p.108)

The narrative reveals the trace of history through the physical presence of buildings and signs. The signs are particularly revealing, 'Colonialwaren', 'Südfrüchte', and 'Importe' belonging to the vocabulary of the past, and representative of a different ideology to the prevailing one of the present. They represent the textual nature of history beyond the mere reference to a politically outdated mode of vocabulary, insofar as history exists in the form of narrative, and this small observation is itself a reminder of the continuity and discontinuity between the past and the present. The new society has failed to eradicate completely the traces of the past. Although the script is faded, it becomes symbolic of a gesture of defiance against the process of change, as well as a warning of the futility of attempting to cover over the past. As



such, it acts as a further, symbolic reminder of the purpose of Claudia's visit and a narrative which has yet to be revealed.

The former connection with the town which Claudia attempts to re-establish at a superficial level has been broken. She no longer has a direct, human link to the town in the present. Her presence is transient; she has become anonymous, appearing like a name in a hotel guest book. What Claudia hopes to re-establish is a kindly human contact with the past. The passage of time renders this impossible, however. Frau Wirsing, the manageress of the bakery by the market place where she went as a child, is no longer there. Instead, she encounters the abrupt and harsher world of the present. Claudia is quickly forced to recognise the physical divide between her memory of her past and the physical reality of the present:

Für mich würde G. die Stadt eines zwölfjährigen Mädchens bleiben, angefüllt mit den Hoffnungen und Schrecken eines Kindes, dem ich mich eigentümlich distanziert verbunden fühlte. (p.108)

The sense of distance and isolation which Claudia now feels from the past is further reinforced by her encounter with a former classmate, Lucie Brehm. Her memory of Lucie Brehm, whom she describes as an outsider in her class, is bound to the more disturbing memory of the ritual of humiliation Claudia and her classmates suffered at the hands of the physical education teacher, Herr Ebert. Lucie Brehm is representative of the difference and 'otherness' which Claudia and her classmates, brought up with an awareness of the necessity to conform to the expectations of society, fear most. The humiliation which Lucie in particular suffers, and which Claudia now recalls, unites the others against her.

There are many cross-references in this episode too to the narrative account of childhood in *Kindheitsmuster*, the similarities creating an inter-textual link between the trauma and degrading humiliation suffered by those of limited physical ability in the cultural environment of Nazi Germany, and the continuity of the obsession with physical strength and sporting ability in the education policy of the GDR:

Noch Jahre nach der Schule belastete es mich, unsportlich zu sein, ungelenk, eine 'Matschpflaume'. Und als ich endlich darüber sprechen konnte, zeigte sich zögernd und vorsichtig, daß die Erinnerungen der anderen ähnlich waren. Jeder hatte seinen Herr Ebert, jeder spürte noch Jahre nach der Schule den festen und schmerzlichen Griff, die ätzenden Bemerkungen. Ich glaube jetzt, meine Generation ging in den Turnhallen ihrer Schulen so nachhaltig auf die Matte, daß es noch immer in allen Gliedern steckt (auch in der

Matschpflaume und dem Saftsaack). Irgendwie haben uns die Leibesertüchtigungen gründlich lädiert. (pp.112-113)

The recollection of the suffering inflicted by the physical education teacher is an implicit reference to the trauma of the opening dream sequence and the runners with the runic design on their shirts. Claudia's narrative continues with a refutation of her experience as a purely subjective account, in recognition of what she is expected to perceive as the purpose behind her education, and at the same time as a realisation that she still suffers from the effects of the humiliation which she experienced:

Natürlich ist das alles von mir übertrieben, zugespitzt subjektiv, unhaltbar. Eine verstiegene, private Ansicht, ohne ausreichende Erkenntnis der wirklichen Probleme, Schwierigkeiten und Erfolge. Natürlich fehlt mir die Übersicht, um solche Erlebnisse richtig einschätzen zu können. Mir fehlt die Übersicht, weil ich noch immer auf der Matte liege. (p.113)

Claudia's initial impulse on seeing Lucie is to approach her and try to re-establish a contact with the past. It is Henry who dissuades her from doing so, aware of the futility of such a gesture given the years which have elapsed. The Lucie Brehm whom Claudia remembers from her school days is a different person to the woman who faces her now, the narrative portraying a very conventional image of beauty through suffering:

Sie war schöner geworden. Das dumme, dickliche Kindergesicht hatte sanfte, gleichmäßige Linien bekommen. Ihre Augen blickten wie früher hilflos, aber was uns damals verlogen und unterwürfig erschien, hatte jetzt etwas von einem alles verstehenden Schimmer. (p.110)

Lucie too has conformed to the social role expected of her. She is now a mother, in contrast to Claudia. However, Claudia's narrative reveals that for Lucie, achieving this model of conformity is in itself a measure of social success. Like Claudia, she has had to pay an emotional price for her acceptance by society, although in Lucie's case, conforming to the ideals of society is portrayed as her reward.

The visit to 'G' removes the hollow facade of her childhood memories. The small provincial town is revealed for what it really is: boring and oppressive. Alone in her hotel room with three bottles of beer, Claudia once more reflects on her journey to 'G'. She now sees the journey as a silly mistake. The impressions which she had hoped would be reinforced do not exist. The comforting veneer which had concealed the trauma of her childhood has disappeared. Claudia claims the past cannot be retraced. Images are distorted and corrupted. What remains is a false impression.

However, with the disappearance of the comforting images with which she had concealed her past, Claudia's fears are once more laid bare:

Die Vergangenheit ist nicht mehr auffindbar. Es bleiben nur die ungenauen Reste und Vorstellungen in uns. Verzerrt, verschönt, falsch. Nichts ist mehr überprüfbar. Meine Erinnerungen sind unwiderleglich geworden. Es war, wie ich es bewahrt habe, wie ich es bewahre. Meine Träume können nicht mehr beschädigt werden, meine Ängste nicht mehr gelöscht. Mein G. ist nicht mehr vorhanden. (p.115)

The importance of structures of socialisation in the ninth chapter of the novella is the central theme of Hannes Krauss' analysis in 'Mit geliehenen Worten das Schweigen brechen'.<sup>14</sup> Krauss also makes comparisons between the recollection of Claudia's childhood in 'G' and Wolf's novel *Kindheitsmuster*. In both the novel and the novella, structures of socialisation are responsible for shaping the characters of two young girls. Whereas Wolf's novel is concerned with capturing the memories and events of a childhood during the time of the National Socialist dictatorship, the ninth chapter of Hein's novella focuses on a childhood during the early years of the GDR and real existing socialism. Comparisons between the two texts also invite comparisons between the two systems of social control. However, Hein's aim, as he has stated with reference to his novel *Horns Ende* in an interview with Krzysztof Jachimczak, is not to present history merely as a cyclical repetition of events, but to depict history in a broader sense with both aspects of continuity and closure:

Daß eine Geschichtsbetrachtung, die allein die Zäsur sieht, sich dann über die aufgezeigte Kontinuität erregt, verstehe ich, andererseits könnte eine Geschichtsbetrachtung, die allein die Kontinuität sieht, sich über die [...] Zäsur erregen. Ich halte beides für einseitige, unsinnige Geschichtsbetrachtungen.<sup>15</sup>

A comparison between the two texts illuminates the trace of history through the structures of socialisation, whilst at the same time drawing attention to their historical differences, which is in turn emphasised by the specific, historical context. Krauss draws attention to the link between certain aspects of bourgeois socialisation which paved the way for the rise of fascism, and the ideals and values which comprise

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<sup>14</sup> Hannes Krauss, 'Mit geliehenen Worten das Schweigen brechen', in *Text + Kritik*, 111, pp.16-27.

<sup>15</sup> Krzysztof Jachimczak, 'Gespräch mit Christoph Hein', *Sinn und Form* 40, 2 (1988), 343-359 (p.354f.)

socialisation in the GDR. The disappointment of socialist ideals is, according to Krauss, a consequence of prevailing structures of socialisation:

Nicht ohne Brisanz ist, wenn Hein diese Traditionslinie bis zur sozialistischen Erziehung verlängert und gleichzeitig um aktuelle politische Komponenten ergänzt. In der (historisch neuen) Enttäuschung sozialistischer Ideale kommt die traditionelle Politikabstinenz des Kleinbürgertums zum Vorschein. Altbewährte und in zahlreichen Sprichwörtern geronnene bürgerliche Sozialtugenden, die einst dem Faschismus keinen Widerstand entgegenzusetzen hatten, weil sie sich in ihm wiederfanden, verschmelzen mit dem vorgeblich neuen Ideal sozialistischer Wachsamkeit.<sup>16</sup>

Hein's text is transformed, for Krauss, from what in the first instance appears to be a portrayal of alienation in society in general, to a critique of GDR Stalinism as a result of the revelation of the continuity of structures of socialisation. These structures allow an authoritarian political system to exercise its will by recourse to actions which are readily understood by a population which has learned their meaning under a different guise in the past:

So wird sein Text, der auf den ersten Blick nur ein gesellschaftsübergreifendes Lebensbild der Entfremdung zu zeichnen scheint, zum frühen Versuch einer Kritik am DDR-Stalinismus. Einer Variante, der sich nur einmal unverhüllt gewalttätig geben mußte und danach relativ moderat gerieren konnte, weil ihre Herrschaft in den Köpfen und Seelen der Opfer und Täter verankert worden war durch Abrichtungsstrategien, die sich bereits unter anderen Gewaltsystemen bewährt hatten.<sup>17</sup>

There is, however an important difference between a reading of the text which focuses on the disappointment at the failure of socialist ideals and one which considers the text a critique of GDR Stalinism. This comes across in the difference between the generations, demonstrated by the difficulties Claudia experiences in the relationship between herself and her parents, in particular her father. Claudia's generation does not experience the disappointment of the failure to realise socialist ideals because her generation is itself a product of GDR Stalinism. Their disappointment is not registered at the level of idealism. Their conformity within a system which has been moulded around Stalinist structures of socialisation has been achieved through fear, which they experience through the reactions of the older generation. The 17th July 1953 and the crushing of the rebellion in the GDR by the state is experienced by both generations in different ways, from different historical perspectives. The recollection of the event

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<sup>16</sup> Krauss, p.21.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.22.



through the relatively minor detail of the appearance of a tank in the market place in 'G' is typical of the manner by which Hein allows history to reveal itself in his texts. It is a significant moment in GDR history, and represents one of the key moments which, for Hein, signalled the beginning of the end of any genuine attempt to establish a true socialist society on German soil. The crushing of the workers rebellion by the state, and the use of the army against the people shows GDR socialism as a model of Stalinism. It constitutes one of the taboo subjects of GDR history, around which Hein's literary chronicles are constructed. These events remain for the most part peripheral to the texts, however, appearing fleetingly, their significance to be grasped from the stories which are built upon them. As such, they are also further evidence of the similarities between Hein's literary portrayal of history and Benjamin's explanation for the way in which the past reveals itself in the present in his historical theses. The nature of the text as a chronicle again becomes apparent, insofar as the past is revealed without explanation or commentary. The sudden appearance of the tank is not related in the text to the actual historical event of which its appearance is evidence. Instead, judgement is deferred, allowing the different reactions of the children and the adults to speak for the significance of the event. It is the reader who is then left to make the connections which will reveal the importance of the event in the context of history.

The children greet the arrival of the tank in the market place in 'G' with excitement, the teachers and parents with horror and silence. Claudia's teacher, Frau Nitschke, disliked by the children for trying to teach them about the beauty of language against the conformist standards to which they already adhered, wins their sympathy through her reaction to this event:

Nur ein einziges Mal entstand in uns etwas wie Verständnis für diese eigentümliche, uns fremde Frau. An jenem Tag, als der Panzer kam und wir erregt ans Fenster stürzten, saß sie mit Schüttelfrost auf dem Stuhl vor dem Lehrertisch. Sie wirkte wie gelähmt. Wir umstanden sie und versuchten, ihr zu helfen. Sie war nicht ansprechbar. Wir hatten Angst, und zwei Mädchen weinten hysterisch. (p.118)

It is the alarm which Frau Nitschke shows, based on her understanding of the significance of the appearance of the tank from her own experience of history, which induces fear in the children. The significance of the event in political terms is lost on the children, becoming apparent only later. 'Die gewaltsame Durchsetzung der



‘Volksherrschaft’ gegen das eigene Volk’ is not comprehended by the children in the sense that it is understood in an historical context.<sup>18</sup> Instead, a sense of the significance of the event is learned through the fear and silence of the adult generation, who understand the historical consequence of the event. The fear experienced by one generation and the repression of this fear is passed down to the next:

Im Unterricht wurde aber ohnehin nicht darüber gesprochen. Keiner der Schüler fragte nach etwas, und die Lehrer sagten gleichfalls nichts. Ich begriff nicht, warum darüber nicht gesprochen werden durfte. Aber da tatsächlich keiner der Erwachsenen über den Panzer sprach, spürte ich, daß auch ein Gespräch etwas Bedrohliches sein konnte. Ich fühlte die Angst der Erwachsenen, miteinander zu reden. Und ich schwieg, damit sie nicht reden mußten. (p.120)

Disappointment in the failure of idealism is experienced by Claudia’s father and his generation. Unlike the first generation of GDR citizens, they have also witnessed the realities of National Socialism. The children, however, learn how to react to the appearance of the tank in the square through the response of the adults, a response which was in turn learned as a reaction to the oppressive methods of enforcing conformity under National Socialism. In this way, another aspect of bourgeois socialisation, obedience to the state and silence as a response to political oppression, is passed down from one generation to the next.

Claudia’s political apathy is contrasted with her father’s commitment to the ideals of GDR socialism. He is disappointed in Claudia for her lack of understanding of world events. She becomes a scapegoat for her father’s frustration and disappointment:

Er sagte, daß ich ein studierter Schwachkopf sei, weil ich keine Zeitung lese. Er habe seine Kinder politisch erzogen, und er sei von mir enttäuscht. Ich sagte ihm, daß ich zur Zeit viele Probleme hätte, die mir mehr auf den Nägeln brennen würden als seine Weltpolitik. (p.36)

His experience of life in the new Socialist Republic has left him bitter and disillusioned, leaving him to express his alienation and frustration through inarticulate anger. The differences in attitudes between Claudia and her father emphasise Hein’s approach to the themes of continuity and change in history. A different mentality prevails in the GDR of the 1980’s to that of the 1950’s. The perspective of Claudia’s

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<sup>18</sup> Krauss, p.23.

generation is limited to the immediate present. The route back to the past is blocked by silence. She is unable to find a way of explaining the differences which exist between the generations, and accepts and observes the differences which exist between herself and her father as simple matters of fact:

Er interessierte sich für Politik und ich nicht oder sehr wenig. Das ist eben so, und mehr ist dazu nicht zu sagen. Und wenn er mein Verhalten falsch findet, so muß er sich dafür nicht entschuldigen. (p.40)

The reflections on her childhood in her hotel room in 'G' are prompted by the recollection of the visit Claudia makes to her old school. She remembers the events surrounding the removal of her history teacher, Herr Gerschke, and, by association, the rough, matter-of-fact manner in which she was sexually enlightened by her mother. Claudia recalls that Herr Gerschke was loved by all the girls in her class, including herself. Consequently, she made great efforts to win his praise by reading extra books on history, in spite of the fact that she found them boring. This short extract is another literary representation of one of the important themes in Hein's fiction, which appears in his short stories as well as being developed in the later prose works *Horns Ende* and *Der Tangospieler*, namely the role of the historian in relation to the state. It is a theme which takes on more significance in Hein's other works than is the case in *Drachenblut*. In each case, however, the consequences for Hein's historians remain the same; their work places them in a precarious position with regard to their relationship with authority and the state. The fate of Herr Gerschke is similar in this respect to the other historians of Hein's fiction, although the circumstances surrounding it are more banal and less well documented. Herr Gerschke is accused by one of the girls of sexual assault, is removed from the school and imprisoned. He is later re-habilitated and finds work as a teacher in another town, the accusations against him proving to be merely the adolescent fantasies of the girl.

The vulnerability of the historian, both ethically and morally, is demonstrated by the case of Herr Gerschke. In this instance, however, the role of Herr Gerschke is more a symbolic representation of the crisis which surrounds them. The fate of the historian plays an integral part in the critique of official historical writing in the GDR. The manipulation of history to serve the needs of the state leaves the historian vulnerable at both an ethical and a moral level.

However, it is not only the historian who must beware of the caprices of the state. More than two decades after the incident concerning Herr Gerschke, Claudia's father becomes a victim of authority when he is disciplined for hitting an apprentice at work. Disciplinary action serves in this case as an excuse to pension him off, as he had reached the retirement age, and means that the commemoration of his sixty-fifth birthday is postponed. The case causes her father great distress. He breaks off all contact with his employer and his colleagues. In both instances, the real purpose behind the punishment lies in the arbitrary exercise of the power of the state as an exemplary reminder to the population of the consequences of insubordination or opposition. Parallels can again be drawn between the authoritarian character of the GDR state and the recent history of the Nazi dictatorship.

The key to Claudia's personal trauma is the breakdown of her childhood friendship with Katharina. The causes of this breakdown can be found in a combination of factors. Trivial personal rivalry and emotional reaction act at a superficial level to enforce the split between Claudia and Katharina. However, the effects of the administration of political ideology, though appearing only as a backdrop to the drama of Claudia's personal life, is ultimately shown to have the most profound effect upon the relationship with Katharina. The entire episode can be seen as a literary portrayal of socialisation in the GDR.

Katharina and her family are regarded as distinct from the majority of society in 'G' because of their religious beliefs. Claudia is influenced by Katharina's religion. She finds the bible stories fascinating and captivating. The contrast between Katharina's religion and the atheism of the state not only fascinates Claudia but intensifies her friendship with Katharina. The distinct character of religious belief in an atheistic society becomes a source of identity for her at an age when identity and individuality begin to play an influential role. She creates a bond with Katharina not only at a superficial level by wearing the same hairstyle, but also by way of a agreement concerning the question of religious truth.

The question of religious truth places the novella in a specific, GDR context, as opposed to being a general critique of alienation in modern society. Claudia's education takes place during the time of the atheist campaign in the GDR in the

1950s, when restrictions were imposed by the state on religious practice. Her father is concerned that her preoccupation with religion will cause her difficulties in society and prejudice her chances of success. He is aware of the consequences of holding on to religious beliefs in a fanatically atheist state, and tries to encourage her to end her friendship with Katharina:

Anderthalb Jahre vor jenem Sommer der Entscheidung bat er mich eindringlich, alles zu unterlassen, was mit Kirche oder Religion zu tun habe. Er bat mich auch, meine Freundschaft mit Katharina zu überdenken, da er sich große Sorgen um meinen weiteren Lebensweg mache. Ich verstand ihn nicht, begriff aber, daß er ernstlich beunruhigt war und mir helfen wollte. Trotzdem weigerte ich mich, meine Freundin seltener zu treffen oder sie gar zu verraten. (p.122)

Claudia's loyalty to her friend proves stronger than the concerns of her father, and once more demonstrates the gulf which exists between the political and historical experience of the adult world and the naivety of childhood. The difference which Katharina represents is not perceived as dangerous by Claudia. Indeed, the story of the friendship between the two girls is a positive celebration of difference in the face of blandness, fear and conformity. The trust which exists between them allows them the freedom to discuss everything. They are able to talk about the arrival of the tank in 'G' when the adult world is reduced to silence.

Considerable constraints are put upon Katharina's family, and they are persecuted for their religious beliefs. They are barred from holding positions of responsibility at work, and deprived of opportunities to further their education. The persecution and prejudice which they encounter is illegal in constitutional terms, but is carried out regardless. Katharina becomes a victim of this persecution too. She is not allowed to attend the secondary school, in spite of the fact that she is academically well qualified to do so, on the grounds that the school and local authorities consider her unable to achieve the educational goals of a secondary school in the GDR. Claudia, on the other hand, encounters no difficulties because of her communist background.

Initially, Claudia feels personally responsible for the way in which Katharina and her family are treated. Although the persecution which Katharina suffers appears superficially to strengthen their friendship, the effects of the pressure on Claudia to conform to the norms of society and reject her friendship grow increasingly stronger:



Die Belastungen unserer Freundschaft durch meine Eltern und Lehrer, die Entscheidung der Schulbehörde, die mich privilegierte und Katharina ihres Glaubens oder ihrer Brüder wegen benachteiligte, die zunehmende Verbitterung der Mutter meiner Freundin, die ihre Tochter ungerecht behandelt sah und dem Entschluß der Söhne, das Land zu verlassen, um im westlichen Deutschland ihr Glück oder zumindest ihr weiteres Leben zu finden, nun nachträglich zustimmte und ihn offen verteidigte, all dies schwebte unausgesprochen über uns. Immer häufiger trennten wir uns im Streit. (p.124)

The pressure to conform to the ideals of the state as well as the influence of socialisation on Claudia's development are brought to bear on the friendship between the two girls, to the extent that their loyalty to one another is tested to the extreme. In the end, a trivial incident compounded by the jealousy which Claudia suffers because of the relationship developing between Katharina and the choirmaster's son together with her sense of exclusion from Katharina's confidence acquires unmerited significance, and provides the excuse which leads to the rupture of the friendship.

In a final, symbolic act to mark the end of her friendship with Katharina, Claudia betrays her friend in an act of public denial of the beliefs they shared. She mocks Katharina's religious beliefs and openly sides with the ideology of the state. Her denial occurs during the enrolment of members of the class in the socialist youth movement. Katharina is the only person who refuses to join the *Freie Deutsche Jugend*, a refusal which prolongs the classroom debate on the issue. The schoolteacher turns Katharina's argument against itself, so that her refusal to accept membership becomes a denial of the principles and ideals of the movement, and makes her appear principally opposed to the ideals of peace and freedom:

Der Eintritt in den Jugendverband wurde uns als eine Entscheidung für den Weltfrieden dargestellt, und Katharina hatte den massiven Schlußfolgerungen der Lehrerin so wenig entgegensetzen. Sie beteuerte, gleichfalls für den Frieden zu sein, doch die logisch wirkenden Verknüpfungen der Lehrerin, die Weigerung, in den Jugendverband einzutreten, sei gleichbedeutend mit Kriegshetze, knüppelten Katharina und machten sie stumm. (p.125)

The arguments which the teacher puts forward demonstrate ideological instruction in practice. The simple oppositions presented by the teacher create the illusion of a logical choice between good and bad, which is used to prevail upon and unite the class against Katharina. Claudia's mockery of Katharina's beliefs in front of her classmates takes on the obvious significance of an act of religious symbolism in the context of the friendship between the two. Her betrayal of her religious beliefs and conformity to the ideals of the state is a response at an ideological level to her vulnerability at a personal level. The acceptance of the values and aims of the state,



and the security in identity and substitution for friendship which this affords her, is made at the cost of the development of her own ideals and values and the uncertainties which accompany them. At the time when Claudia and Katharina should decide the question of the validity of religious belief, Katharina leaves the GDR with her mother to join her brothers in the West. Claudia's response is one of relief, and she denounces Katharina's actions as an act of betrayal against the Republic:

In jenem Sommer, in dem wir die Gretchenfrage unseres Glaubens gemeinsam und endgültig entscheiden wollten, zog Katharina mit ihrer Mutter zu den Brüdern nach Niedersachsen. Ich war erleichtert, als ich es hörte, und fast mit Stolz erzählte ich meinem Vater, daß Katharina die Republik verraten habe. (p.126)

Katharina's departure removes the physical reminder of their friendship and with it the challenge to Claudia's new conformist identity. She claims to experience almost a sense of pride when she informs her father of Katharina's flight in the language and idiom of state ideology. In this instance, the organised atheist campaign succeeds in achieving its aim. Claudia's reward, a red leather briefcase, for her achievements in meeting the expectations of society is again a symbolic reminder of the nature of the contract between herself and authority and its personal cost.

Claudia's account of her friendship with Katharina is a recollection of the betrayal of the closest friend she would ever have. It is also a recollection of the personal cost of conformity to a doctrinaire ideology, and the betrayal of principles and individual aspirations in favour of the security afforded by collective identity. In a gesture which represents her despair at the memory of this broken friendship, Claudia pours beer onto the rug by her chair: 'Eine Libation für ein Mädchen, das ich so rückhaltlos geliebt hatte, wie ich nie wieder einen Menschen sollte lieben können.' (p.126)

Betrayal is a theme with which Claudia's narrative remains, as she reflects on the story of her uncle Gerhard. The kindly impression of her uncle which she retained throughout her childhood is shattered when she learns that he is to face trial for the betrayal of comrades in the Social Democratic and Communist parties to the Nazis, and is accused of conspiracy in their murder. Her father later receives an admonishment from the judge for having failed to inform on his cousin. The episode once more raises the question of the conflict of loyalties between individuals and the state.

Claudia does not fully comprehend what could have made her uncle betray his comrades, having been a member of the Social Democratic Party himself from the age of seventeen. She sympathises with him nonetheless, believing that the Nazis could easily have intimidated him and forced him to collaborate through fear:

Ich weiß nicht, was meinen Onkel zu einem solchen Verrat bewogen hat. Er war ein heiterer, gütiger Mann, der zu Tränen neigte, und ich glaube, daß ihn die Nazis schnell einschüchtern konnten und er aus Furcht die Genossen verriet. (p.128)

Her sympathetic understanding of her uncle and his weaknesses, and the admission of the fear which she believes led him to betray his comrades represents a considerable departure in the text from the standard portrayal of life under the Nazi dictatorship in GDR literature. The case of Claudia's uncle throws up contradictions and paradoxes which, in their historical context, undermine the simplistic, binary opposition of good and evil, ideology and counter-ideology. It also offers another link between the past and the present, insofar as it appears in Claudia's narrative immediately after her account of the break-up of her friendship with Katharina, and invites a comparison between her betrayal of Katharina and her uncle's betrayal of his comrades. In both cases, personal loyalties are placed in opposition to loyalty to the state. Her assessment of the case of her uncle is also a reminder of the pressure that was brought to bear on her to reject her friendship with Katharina and conform to the expectations of the state.

The story of Claudia's uncle is typical of Hein's method of brushing history the wrong way, as an exercise in what Benjamin describes as the duties of the historical materialist. The portrayal of the anti-fascist as collaborator brings into focus and questions the nature of the totalitarian state and engages the reader in dialogue with the past once more, by calling into question the assertions and assumptions which form part of the official historical narrative. Her uncle's trial throws Claudia once more into crisis. The contradictions which her uncle's case reveals between her understanding of the horror of the Nazi dictatorship on the one hand, and the knowledge of the character of her uncle on the other, leave her feeling hypocritical in expressing horror at the brutality of fascism. She feels guilty by association and unable to share the moral position which her society has claimed for itself in opposition to fascism:

Damals brach für mich eine Welt zusammen. Mein Entsetzen über die faschistischen Schrecken, meine Tränen beim Lesen des Tagebuchs der Jüdin Anne Frank erschienen mir nun verlogen und geheuchelt. Ich meinte, das Recht verloren zu haben, mich über die Greuel zu empören oder mitleidig zu sein. Anfangs hatte ich das Bedürfnis, mich zu säubern, mich öffentlich schuldig zu sprechen. In meinen Schulaufsätzen schrieb ich, daß ich die Nichte eines Naziverbrechers sei und die Opfer nicht noch durch mein Mitgefühl verhöhnen dürfte. (p.128)

The case of her uncle brings Claudia once more into conflict with the demands of identification with the ideology of the state. Her personal identity through that of the state is also brought into question as a result of her uncle's actions. It is through her experience of this crisis of identity, however, that she learns to repress memories and incidents which threaten to undermine her. Her behaviour is criticised by another of her classmates as being affected. She finds herself in a hopeless situation and considers her problems to be a nuisance to others. As a result, Claudia learns to resort to silence:

Daheim erwähnte keiner den Onkel, ich auch nicht mehr. Wurde über den Faschismus gesprochen, hielt ich mich zurück und blieb einsilbig. Ich begriff, daß ich ein Ärgernis war, unlösbar, unaufhebbar, erklärungslos. Und ich begann zu schweigen, um nicht andere zu belästigen. (pp.128-129)

The repression of memory and the lapse into silence are things Claudia has already witnessed in the adult world as responses to crises, and which have been passed down through structures of socialisation to transcend the boundaries of different political systems. The narrative of her childhood uncovers the similarities in terms of patterns of thought and behaviour between the past and present. As such, the trace of history undermines the structures which are built over it, and which attempt to conceal it by substituting it with an alternative understanding of history.

The symbolism of the opening dream sequence is reflected in the events which constitute the ninth chapter of the novella. It is from Claudia's narrative account of her childhood that the causes of her present day alienation can be derived. The ninth chapter also represents Hein's attempt to adapt the ideas which he develops from his interpretation of Benjamin's theses on history into fiction. Claudia's involuntary recollection of her childhood and the formative influences of GDR socialisation highlights the continuities and discontinuities of the past in the present. It also reveals the one event in Claudia's personal history, the break-up of her friendship with Katharina, which suddenly offers the opportunity to challenge the narrative of

repression which provides her with the perspective from which she now makes her judgements. It is as a result of this contrast between the two narrative perspectives that Hein's literary chronicle of two distinct periods of GDR history is revealed.



## Chapter 4

### Horns Ende

Hein's first novel *Horns Ende* is arguably the most radical stylistic example of the author's works of prose fiction. Constructed around the fragmented, narrative accounts of five narrators, the novel tells the story of the events surrounding the suicide of the museum curator, Horn, in the fictional provincial town of Bad Guldenberg. Although the narratives focus on the GDR during the 1950's, the time of the character Horn's death, they extend in part beyond this period to reveal aspects of the town's history from the National Socialist dictatorship of the 1930's to the present day. The composition of the novel in the form of fragmented narratives represents a departure from the first person narrative style of the previously published novella *Drachenblut*. The designation of the title 'novel' to the text is also significant in terms of the presentation of its content, particularly in relation to the author's concept of the chronicle and its reception and development from the ideas of Walter Benjamin.

The relationship between the individual narratives and the novel itself is a complex one, which both reinforces and transcends the distinctions between the 'Erzählung' and the 'Roman' in relation to the chronicle as defined by Benjamin. The narratives themselves are based on the oral tradition of the 'Erzählung' in terms of their linguistic style and composition. However, their content and purpose extend beyond the simple recording of the past to an attempt to explain this past, which in turn introduces the psychological perspective associated with the novel. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of five, subjective narrative accounts, each with their own rationale, undermines the uniform, psychological perspective of a single narrator and presents five different accounts based on a single event, which reconciles the novel to the aims of the chronicle as an impartial, detached record of the past as it appears in the present.

The concern of the novel with the nature of the chronicle and historical writing is not limited to its structure and composition. In *Horns Ende* Hein creates a literary fiction against an historical backdrop of GDR society in the early 1950's which in turn reveals a confrontation of perspectives regarding the understanding of history and the

purpose of historical writing. When questioned about the content of the novel, he is recorded as saying:

Wenn ich mit kurzen Worten das Thema des Romans nennen sollte, denn würde ich sagen, es ist ein Roman über Geschichte, über Geschichtsverständnis, auch über Geschichtsschreibung.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas with *Drachenblut* GDR criticism had for the most part deliberately overlooked the historical aspects of the text, with *Horns Ende* this proved impossible. As Lothar Baier comments, Hein's first novel faced great difficulties with the censor, and was published only after a considerable struggle.<sup>2</sup> Even then, it was largely ignored by literary editors of GDR newspapers and acquired only scant recognition in literary magazines and journals. Indeed, where critiques of the novel did appear, most of these were published over one year after the publication of the novel.

The combination of all these factors: the difficulties surrounding the publication of the novel, the lack of media publicity and the very few, belated and cautious reviews, all serve to demonstrate the problems which the novel posed for the GDR literary establishment. The impact made by the appearance of *Drachenblut* several years before, additionally served to add to Hein's reputation as a critic of GDR society.

Earlier reviews in the West German press by contrast highlighted the historical aspects of the novel. In the article 'Kampf um Erinnerung', Sibylle Cramer makes the connection between the novel, with its emphasis on socialisation, and the phrase used to describe the fundamental attitudes to daily life in the National Socialist dictatorship, 'der gewöhnliche Faschismus'. She goes on to write:

Damit ist das Substrat an übernommenen Denkstrukturen und Verhaltensmustern gemeint, das die Gründung der sozialistischen Gesellschaftsordnung überlebte.<sup>3</sup>

Cramer points out the continuity of aspects of socialisation from the past in the new, socialist society, which are revealed through the narratives from which the novel is composed.

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<sup>1</sup> Krzysztof Jachimczak, 'Gespräch mit Christoph Hein', p.355.

<sup>2</sup> *Christoph Hein. Texte, Daten, Bilder*, p.8.

<sup>3</sup> Sibylle Cramer, 'Kampf um Erinnerung', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 9 October 1985, p.6.

Claus Leggewie regards the novel as an alternative to the standard GDR interpretation of its own history, and draws attention to Hein's attempt at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.<sup>4</sup> In a similar manner to Hein's criticism of the writing of history in the GDR for its lack of dialectic analysis of the past, Leggewie turns a Marxist dictum against the doctrinaire ideology which claims Marxism as its political and intellectual inspiration: 'Die Tradition aller toten Geschlechter lastet wie ein Alp auf dem Gehirne der Lebenden'.<sup>5</sup>

The contrasting interpretations of history which the novel presents are put forward by the characters Dr. Spodeck, Kruschkatz and Horn. Of the three, only Kruschkatz and Dr. Spodeck are given a narrative voice. Horn, by contrast, is given a voice only through the recollections of the narrators, as well as through the imaginary dialogues which introduce each new chapter.

Kruschkatz, the mayor of Bad Guldenberg during the period in which Horn is employed as curator of the local museum, offers two different perspectives for the understanding of history. One is based in the present time of the narrative, and reflects his disillusionment with society as a result of his experiences as mayor. The other reflects the idealism which influenced his earlier life, and which in turn serves to illustrate the ideology of the state during the period of the 1950's.

As a representative of state bureaucracy, Kruschkatz' former understanding of history reveals not only the ideological perspective of officialdom during this period of GDR history, but also the actual historical situation of the state which gave rise to it. His interpretation of history at this time can best be described as one of expediency. He is an apologist for the political actions of the state where these actions are unjust, because they are deemed necessary in the name of progress and the goal of establishing a socialist society. This attitude underlies his assessment of the proceedings against Horn in Leipzig, in which Horn is called before a commission to answer the charge of having ignored the principle of *Parteilichkeit* in his work. The result is his demotion and the removal of his title of doctor. Horn's arrival in Bad

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<sup>4</sup> Claus Leggewie, 'Wie ein Alp auf den Seelen', *Die Zeit*, 14-28 March 1986, p.59

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59.

Guldenberg after the investigation into his activities in Leipzig, to the time of his suicide following further investigation into his work in the museum and accusations of revisionism, coincides with the *Tauwetter* period which followed the death of Stalin in March 1953, which was ended by the Central Committee of the SED in January 1957. The fate of Horn the historian therefore coincides with actual historical events.

Kruschkatz defends the actions of the commission 'Im Interesse der gemeinsamen Sache und des großen Ziels und in Erkenntnis seiner feigen Zugeständnisse an die bürgerliche Ideologie'.<sup>6</sup> Kruschkatz claims that Horn was the victim of an injustice which had its moral justification in the name of history:

Ihm war dort Unrecht geschehen, gewiß, und an diesem Unrecht hatte ich meinen Anteil, ich habe es nie bestritten. Aber es gibt eine höhere Moral, vor der sich Recht und Unrecht die Waage halten oder gemeinsam zu fragwürdigen Werten schrumpfen. Es war ihm ein geschichtlich notwendiges Unrecht angetan worden im Namen eines höheren Rechts, im Namen der Geschichte. (p.59)

Kruschkatz justifies the action taken against Horn in the name of history. The aim of establishing the socialist state in the GDR is of paramount importance, even if this requires the sacrifice of innocent victims in pursuit of the goal. For Kruschkatz at this particular point in time, the ends justify the means: 'Das schrecklichste Opfer, das der Gang der Geschichte fordert, ist der Tod von Schuldlosen. Er ist der Blutzoll, den der Fortschritt kostet.' (p.63)

Horn's suicide is the unfortunate price which has to be paid for progress, according to Kruschkatz. He even attempts to support this idea by drawing attention to Horn's inability to adapt to the requirements of society and to compromise his principles for the sake of survival. Horn's death is now considered by Kruschkatz as having been predetermined by fate itself:

Horn war für diesen Tod bestimmt wie ein Ochse für den Schlachthof. Er war nicht lebensstüchtig. Er war für ein Leben unter Menschen nicht geeignet. Ich sage dies ohne jede Wertung oder Verachtung, ich habe ihn immer geschätzt. Und ich meine, es ist kein allzu hoher menschlicher Wert, auf dieser Erde lebensstüchtig zu sein. Es gab prächtige Menschen, die es nie waren. Aber da wir nun einmal genötigt sind, in menschlicher Gemeinschaft zu leben, ist ein gewisses Maß an Bereitschaft für dieses Leben, ob zu loben oder nicht, erforderlich und somit eine Tugend. Eine Tugend, die Horn nicht besaß. (pp.61-62)

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<sup>6</sup> Christoph Hein, *Horns Ende*, 4th edn (Frankfurt/M: Sammlung Luchterhand, 1989), p.26. [Further references are given after quotations in the text]



Kruschkatz considers Horn's fate to be an inescapable consequence of his character and inability to live in human society, and the result of his preoccupation with self-vindication after the action taken against him in Leipzig. At a dinner to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the local museum, Horn gives a speech to the invited guests. Only Kruschkatz is aware of the real meaning behind Horn's words. Using the forthcoming exhibition of the latest, local archaeological findings as a front for the actual subject of his speech, he attacks Kruschkatz and the commission set up to investigate him in Leipzig:

Er [Horn] langweilte sie, weil sie nicht verstanden, daß er über alles andere als über Archäologie sprach. Und sie wären mit aufmerksamster Neugier seiner Rede gefolgt, wenn sie nur geahnt hätten, daß er - seine altsorbischen Tonscherben vorhaltend - über eine ganz andere Ausgrabung sprach, nämlich über Leipzig, über seinen Parteiausschluß, über mich. In seiner Rede forderte er mich vor die Schranken seines Gesetzes, verklagte und verurteilte mich im Namen seiner ihm teuren Abstraktionen. (p.62)

In contrast to Horn, Kruschkatz has learned the necessary virtue of adaptability which enables him to survive in society. His political office, however, forces him into a situation where many of the contradictory elements present from the outset in the new GDR society come to the fore. The political manoeuvring in which he engages as a response to these problems and contradictions, and also as a means of securing his own political position, show his original beliefs as questionable in the light of the compromises he makes. His experiences of GDR reality is such that he gradually becomes unable to defend his earlier political position. Ironically, it is the cost in human terms of a now apparently illusory social progress, which finally makes him recognise the error of his ways.

The contradictions which force Kruschkatz to compromise his principles through his political office begin to appear with the arrival in the town of the gypsies. This event places Kruschkatz in direct conflict with his deputy, Bachofen. A local bylaw against camping on the Bleicherwiese, which Bachofen cites in his defence against the presence of the gypsies in the town, was passed in the year the gypsies first returned to Bad Guldenberg, and during the time of the Soviet occupation. Its purpose is specifically to exclude the gypsies from the town. Kruschkatz initially claims that he, like his predecessors before him, took it upon himself to inform the gypsies that they must move on, in the full knowledge of the futility of his actions, but in order to avoid reproach:

Dem Beschluß entsprechend, setzte ich die Zigeuner auch in diesem Jahr von dem Verbot in Kenntnis, und ich wußte vorher, daß es ein vergeblicher Gang werden und die Zigeunerfamilie auch in diesem Sommer mitten in unserer Stadt leben würde. Ich war selbst zu ihnen gegangen, obwohl ich den Ratsdiener hätte beauftragen können. Ich war selbst gegangen, weil ich von der Vergeblichkeit überzeugt war, mir aber nichts vorwerfen lassen wollte. (pp.22-23)

The existence of the bylaw is an example of one of the many threads which link the past to the present, as it represents a form of racial intolerance more typically associated with the era of the National Socialist dictatorship which immediately preceded it. Kruschkatz recognises the real implications of this bylaw, and wishes to be seen to reject it on ideological and moral grounds. Bachofen, by contrast, defends the continuing prejudices of a number of the local population on the grounds of legality. In a heated discussion with Kruschkatz, Bachofen makes clear his position. He denies a thinly disguised accusation by Kruschkatz that he and his friends in the town shared sympathies with the Nazis. Bachofen's argument nevertheless displays the traits of the authoritarian character which was exploited by National Socialism:

'Was hast du gegen die Zigeuner?'

'Nichts. Aber wir haben eine Stadt- und Gemeindeordnung, die das wilde Campieren verbietet.'

'Es gibt tausend Bestimmungen, die wir nicht einhalten. Wenn wir anfangen wollen, uns nach allen Bestimmungen zu richten, haben wir ein Chaos.'

'Es ist Gesetz, Kruschkatz.'

'Es gibt kein Gesetz, das uns zwingt, die Zigeuner aus der Stadt zu treiben. Die Zeit ist vorbei, Bachofen.'

'Jedenfalls war da noch Ordnung.'

'Vorsicht, Bachofen.'

'Ich habe mir nichts vorzuwerfen, ich war nie ein Nazi. Im Gegenteil. Aber was recht ist, muß recht bleiben.' (p.134)

Kruschkatz' political will stands in opposition to the law. In addition, Kruschkatz is a representative of the state, whereas Bachofen, a local man, represents the opinions of the townspeople. There exists a conflict between the state and the people, with the state attempting to enforce its political will against attitudes which have been formed under different social and political conditions. Kruschkatz has powerful allies on his side, including the party executive, with which he can counter the pressure Bachofen tries to exert through his local connections. What remains apparent, however, is the absence of any genuine dialogue.

However, it is Bachofen who ultimately prevails, citing a report by a colleague, Martens, which places blame on the gypsies for the reluctance of the local farmers to

join the collective. The hiring of horses from the gypsies reduces the influence of the farmers' collective, and thus undermines the policy of the state. Kruschkatz refutes these arguments, pointing out the reluctance of farmers in other areas to join the collectives, even without the help of the gypsies' horses. Bachofen threatens to present the report to the local party, with or without Kruschkatz' endorsement, at a time when Kruschkatz is away on holiday, thereby ensuring himself of the party's support in his move against the gypsies. The final decision on the fate of the gypsies is therefore made not on a matter of principle, but as a result of bureaucratic manipulation.

The conflict of interests surrounding the gypsies places Kruschkatz in a position where he is forced to decide between remaining true to his principles, at the risk of forfeiting his position, or rejecting these principles in favour of his career and the retention of power. Kruschkatz opts for the latter:

Auf dem Nachhauseweg blieb ich bei der Bleicherwiese stehen. Ich betrachtete die Wohnwagen und die zerlumpten Kinder. Ein Häufchen Elend, das mit seiner schmutzigen Armut und den unverständlichen, kehligen Lauten die kleine Stadt verstörte. Als mich die Frauen bemerkten, riefen sie ihren fetten Häuptling. Mit einem leichten, herablassenden Lächeln stellte er sich in die Tür seines Wohnwagens und winkte mir mit seiner Pranke gönnerhaft zu. Ich betrachtete ihn reglos. Ich wußte, ich würde nichts für ihn tun. (p.138)

The political expediency which underlies Kruschkatz' decision to abandon his beliefs and refuse to act in support of the gypsies is not employed in this instance in the cause of a higher morality, as he claimed was the case in respect of the action taken against Horn in Leipzig, but in order to protect his own interests. The moral responsibility for his compromise now rests with himself as an individual, and not with the state. The capacity to make this compromise demonstrates what Kruschkatz means when he refers to the ability to deal with life, an ability which he recognised as lacking in the character of Horn.

The conflict between principle and expediency at an individual level re-surfaces at the time of the second investigation into the ideological foundations of Horn's work, this time in connection with the local history of Bad Guldenberg. Horn is denounced by a colleague, Alfred Brongel, and also by Bachofen, a friend of Brongel's, for alleged historical revisionism in re-opening the debate on aspects of the past which, in the context of the understanding and writing of history in the GDR, had already been

considered and apportioned their significance. The actions of Bachofen and Brongel are not motivated by a commitment to defending the ideological principles of the state, however, but by careerism.

Historical parallels appear here in the text between Horn's fate and that of Gudrun Gohl, whose self-sacrifice protects the life of her mentally handicapped daughter after the latter has been reported to the Nazis by a resident of the town. The question of continuity from the past to the present is again raised, not in a direct, political context, rather in terms of the transcendence of patterns of thought and behaviour from one society to the next. Gabriele Lindner addresses this point in one of the few articles to appear on the novel in the GDR shortly after its publication:

Über die Familiengeschichte der Gohls wie über den Zigeuner-Erzählstrang ist diese Berufung auf ein höheres Recht der fünfziger Jahre in ein Kontinuum gestellt zur faschistischen Vorgeschichte der Stadt. Dabei wird die Zeit vor und nach 1945 durchaus nicht vordergründig-politisch gleichgesetzt. Das Vergleichsmaß ist das Alltagsverhalten im Provinzstädtchen Guldenberg; die Frage ist, ob es sich unter veränderten politischen Verhältnissen geändert hat. Der Roman verneint das. Er kommt damit nicht nur zu einem weitgehend negativen Befund über erreichten gesellschaftlichen Fortschritt, sondern er meldet auch Skepsis an gegenüber den Möglichkeiten historischen Fortschritts überhaupt.<sup>7</sup>

The concept of progress through history is contradicted in the novel not only by the examples of the continuity of attitudes from the past in the contrasting political reality of the present. The compromise of political principles at an individual level in favour of personal ambitions also calls into question the possibility of progress. Having rejected his political principles on the question of the presence of the gypsies in the town, Kruschkatz finds himself in a similar dilemma following the second denunciation of Horn. Having tried and failed to court Horn's friendship after his arrival in Bad Guldenberg, he fails to defend Horn against the renewed accusations of revisionism in relation to his work. Once more, his actions are governed by fear of the possible repercussions which defending Horn may have with regard to his own career. In a contrived confession of his own weakness and culpability, Kruschkatz immediately submits himself to the authority of the state, in the calculated hope that his humility will save his career. In a similar manner to the way in which he betrayed the gypsies, Kruschkatz now betrays Horn:

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<sup>7</sup> Gabriele Lindner, 'Ein geistiger Widergänger', *Neue deutsche Literatur* 34, 10 (1986), pp.155-161 (p.157)



Der Leutnant sah mich mißbilligend an: 'Eine Frage, Genosse Kruschkatz, wie konntest du Horn so viel Vertrauen schenken? Ausgerechnet du, der ihn seit fast zehn Jahren kannte?' Ohne zu zögern, antwortete ich dem Offizier: 'Es war ein Fehler, Genosse. Ich habe den Gegner unterschätzt. Aber ich habe nicht nur euch enttäuscht, ich bin mit mir selbst unzufrieden. Und ich denke, ich habe dazugelernt. Dank eurer Hilfe, Genossen.' (p.64)

Forced to choose between joining in the general condemnation of Horn's work, which is never fully explained in the text, but which amounts to the same betrayal of the principle of *Parteilichkeit* of which he was accused in Leipzig, or defending Horn and risking his position as mayor, Kruschkatz' judgement is based on self-interest. He signs the document denouncing Horn's actions and the vow to be more vigilant in future against enemies of the state. However, he also admits to signing the document as a result of his frustration with Horn's behaviour towards him, and the way this in turn undermined his status. Finally, Kruschkatz tries to justify his actions by maintaining that he was merely forcing the speedy resolution of an inevitable catastrophe. He attempts to convince himself that his actions are therefore motivated by mercy in the face of unavoidable suffering. It is an argument which recalls Claudia's attempts at self-justification in *Drachenblut* as a means of avoiding confrontation with complicated and disconcerting questions which threaten to undermine her uneasy relationship with reality:

[...] ich unterschrieb auch, weil allein Horns unduldsamer, bornierter Starrsinn mich würdelos machte und ich davon überzeugt war, daß weitere Nachsicht ihm nicht helfen konnte, sondern die Katastrophe lediglich aufschieben würde. Es wäre nur ein Prolongieren des Unheils. (p.89)

Ironically, it is Bachofen's ambition and his accusation of an innocent man which saves Kruschkatz' career. He hastily endorses an allegation against the former mayor of the town, Franz Schneeberger, who, it is claimed, is guilty of the supremely anti-social act of the misappropriation of property left behind by former citizens of the GDR, who had fled the country for the West. Schneeberger spends five days in prison until he is able to prove his innocence. The events leave Schneeberger a broken man and also have consequences for Bachofen, ruining his chances of promotion and strengthening Kruschkatz' position as mayor of Bad Guldenberg. By a twist of fate, Kruschkatz' imminent demise is turned around and becomes his salvation.

In spite of his success against Bachofen, Kruschkatz pays a personal price in his compromised and selfish pursuit of a career. He betrays the promises he made to his

wife Irene not to condemn her to die in a place like Bad Guldenberg. Her desperation in the stifling atmosphere of the small, provincial town is augmented by Horn's suicide, which deprives her of the few entertaining distractions in her life, namely the Thursday evening history lectures in the museum. Irene holds her husband responsible for Horn's death, or at the very least for not taking steps to prevent it. Kruschkatz' complicity with the state in its pursuit of Horn, which leads to Horn's suicide, loses him the affection of his wife:

Einen Tag nach unserem Urlaub, auf den Tag zwei Monate nach dem Auffinden der Leiche Horns, sagte sie zu mir die ungeheuerlichen Worte: 'Ich habe es mir nie zuvor vorstellen können. Du ekelst mich an.' Und ich mußte begreifen, daß ich meine Frau an den toten Horn verloren hatte. (p.91)

Kruschkatz' compromise with authority now becomes his loss, for which no amount of power, prestige or social recognition can compensate. The disgust which his wife feels towards him he gradually begins to feel towards himself. The betrayal of his principles becomes ultimately a betrayal of himself. His despair arises from the realisation that the higher morality for which he first compromised his principles and later corrupted himself was in fact an illusion. The goal towards which history was directed has disappeared, a consequence of the many contradictions which appeared on the way.

At the end of his term of office as mayor, Kruschkatz makes a speech at a party to celebrate the opening of a new fire station in the town, during which he recalls characters and events from his past in Bad Guldenberg. The speech is met by boredom by the younger generation in attendance, their indifference prompting Kruschkatz into early retirement. The realisation that he too constitutes merely expendable matter in the drive towards an increasingly indefinable future, and that he has sacrificed himself and his life for nothing, overwhelms him. He too now experiences betrayal, and is driven to reject out of hand the ideology for which he devoted his life. The higher morality of history, he claims, has proven to be an illusion. History, according to Kruschkatz, has now become the equivalent of religion, an invention designed to give meaning to something which otherwise remains incomprehensible and senseless. The false comfort afforded by history is a support which enables mankind to make sense of its place in time and to provide a meaning for human endeavour:

Ich bin heute dreiundsiebzig Jahre alt, und wenn ich die Erfahrungen meines Lebens für eine daran uninteressierte Nachwelt in einem Satz formulieren müßte, würde ich sagen: Es gibt keine Geschichte. Geschichte ist hilfreiche Metaphysik, um mit der eigenen Sterblichkeit auszukommen, der schöne Schleier um den leeren Schädel des Todes. Es gibt keine Geschichte, denn soviel wir auch an Bausteinen um eine vergangene Zeit ansammeln, wir ordnen und beleben diese kleinen Tonscherben und schwärzlichen Fotos allein mit unserem Atem, verfälschen sie durch die Unvernunft unserer dünnen Köpfe und mißverstehen daher gründlich. Der Mensch schuf sich die Götter, um mit der Unerträglichkeit des Todes leben zu können, und er schuf sich die Fiktion der Geschichte, um den Verlust der Zeit einen Sinn zu geben, der ihm das Sinnlose verstehbar und erträglich macht. Hinter uns die Geschichte und vor uns Gott, das ist das Korsett, das uns den aufrechten Gang erlaubt. (pp.20-21)

History is described by Kruschkatz as a fiction, created by necessity as a result of human inability to fully comprehend and derive meaning from the past. With this rejection of history, Kruschkatz surrenders his former ideals, made valueless through the compromises he has made and contradictions which have arisen between ideology and reality. Even the recollection of the past now appears as a pointless undertaking to him. Kruschkatz does not doubt what he regards as the superficial achievement of collecting and listing events from the past, but questions the entire purpose of the undertaking and the attempt to give meaning to them. Should the discovery then to be made that there exist many, in part contradictory truths, this, he claims, would be a crushing joke at the expense of such endeavour. Moreover, he fears that history will no longer find a recipient to whom it can be addressed:

Ich bezweifle also nicht den äußeren Erfolg, das nahezu vollständige Verzeichnis der Fakten. Vielmehr stelle ich das ganze Unternehmen in Frage. Die Entdeckung, daß es mehrere, zum Teil einander widersprechende Wahrheiten gibt, als endliches Ergebnis solcher Mühe wäre ein niederschmetternder Witz. Noch mehr aber beunruhigt mich der Gedanke, daß die so gefundene Wahrheit beziehungsweise die verschiedenen, schlüssig, vollständig und widerspruchsfrei hergestellten Bilder keinen Adressaten haben. Das ist vorbei. (p.20)

He is a prisoner of his own past, left only with memories which will haunt him to his death. He awaits the end of his life in the hope that this will finally release him from the torture of memory and the silence to which he has condemned himself:

Ich schweige noch heute. Schweigend sitze ich in meinem Zimmer und bemühe mich, die Erinnerungen zu verscheuchen, die sich Nacht für Nacht auf meine Brust hocken, um in mich einzudringen. Träume um Träume, ein ganzes Leben, das sich in Ewigkeit wiederholt. Mich ängstigt die hereinbrechende Nacht, die mir den Schlaf bringt, den schlimmen Bruder des Todes. Wenn ich doch sterben könnte, um allem zu entgehen. Sterben, um nicht zu träumen. (pp.223-224)



Kruschkatz' final position with regard to history is completely devoid of hope and the possibility of redemption. It rejects both the work of the historian and the chronicler. The work of collecting and recording events from the past becomes a pointless undertaking if the meaning which is then attributed to them reveals many contradictory truths. His final position represents a form of historical nihilism, systematically rejecting all values in history. Nevertheless, his position should not to be confused with the cynicism which underlies Dr. Spodeck's historical understanding, in spite of the similarities they share in their final desperation. Indeed, at the outset, these two historical philosophies could not be further apart. Whereas Kruschkatz' original position is based on the concept of progress and directed towards the future, Dr. Spodeck's understanding of history is based on the repetition of evil which is based on the continuity of the past.

For his own misanthropic amusement, and as a documentary account with which to confirm and justify his beliefs, Dr. Spodeck keeps a chronicle of Bad Guldenberg, in which he records all the contemptible acts of the town's inhabitants in the past. His chronicle, by his own definition, takes a stand against the kind of history which seeks merely to flatter the vanity of generations of civic dignitaries. In its place, he writes a chronicle of the hypocrisy which characterises the actions and affairs of his fellow citizens:

Meine andere Arbeit im Vorwerk ist die Geschichte von Bad Guldenberg. Es ist keine Historie der Stadt, die ich schreibe, ich führe keine pathetische Heimatchronik, die den Eitelkeiten obskurer Stadtgrößen schmeicheln will. Was ich auf diesen Blättern notiere, sind lediglich die niederträchtigen Affären und bösartigen Handlungen, durch die sich meine ehrenwerten Mitbürger auszeichneten. Es sind die widerlichen Geschäfte der Einwohner meiner Stadt, die es nie versäumten, ihre eigennützige Boshaftigkeit mit salbungsvollen Reden und achtbaren Motiven zu maskieren. Es ist eine Geschichte der menschlichen Gemeinheit. Ich kann nicht darin lesen, ohne von heftigem Lachen geschüttelt zu werden, vor einem Lachen der Menschenverachtung und des Mitleids über einen solchen Aufwand von Energie um ein paar schäbiger Vorteile willen. (pp.113-114)

Dr. Spodeck's chronicle seeks to illustrate the continuity of the baseness which characterises human activity from the past to the present. Its aims are completely opposed to those of the official understanding of history in the GDR, which are based on the belief in the continuity of human progress. His chronicle is a witness to the atrocities of the Nazi dictatorship, which he emphasises is the legacy of the present inhabitants of Bad Guldenberg:



Ich habe in dieser Stadt gelebt als die Braunhemden in ihr Hof hielten und umjubelt wurden. Ich habe gesehen, wie sich diese Stadt dem alltäglichen Verbrechen öffnete, bereit und willig, und der Heißhunger auf Verrat und Bestialität offenbarte den lange brach gelegenen Blutdurst. Die Denunzianten und Mörder kamen nicht von irgendwo, um dieser Stadt das Gesetz ihres Todes und der Verachtung aufzuzwingen, sie hatten mit uns gelebt, waren Bürger dieses verträumten, sanften Provinzfleckens gewesen, sie sind aus unseren Wohnungen hervorgekrochen, unter unserer Haut. (p.115)

Horn's death brings Dr. Spodeck to liken Bad Guldenberg to a biblical Gomorra. He is unable to forget the cowardice with which the inhabitants of the town allow the perpetration of new wrongs.

After the defeat of the Nazi dictatorship, Dr. Spodeck recalls the sudden character transformations which occurred as people quickly abandoned their old ways in order to escape punishment at the hands of the victors. He places himself above all this, however, enjoying the perversity of the situation and gloating at the pathetic and cowardly nature of the people he has so easily seen through. He feels the urge to take on the mantle of the Old Testament prophet, letting words of damnation rain down upon the guilty as the pages of his chronicle fill themselves. Again, Dr. Spodeck opposes the official historical interpretation of the defeat of National Socialism and subsequent de-nazification which took place, pointing out how the guilty were able to quickly adapt to the new circumstances and remain in their places:

Ich habe den Zusammenbruch in Guldenberg erlebt und war trotz der beharrlichen Bitten meiner Frau nicht zu bewegen, zum Ende des Krieges auf das Vorwerk, in die kaum versehrte Stille des Waldes zu fliehen. Die herzerreißende Komik dieser Tage, die für mich vorauszuahnen war, wollte ich mir nicht entgehen lassen, die vielfältigen Wandlungen, die erwarteten wie die unvorhersehbaren. Es war beklemmend und schaurig, und es war schön. Und die Seiten meiner Geschichte der Gemeinheit füllten sich wie von selbst. Ich hatte in diesen Tagen das deutliche Empfinden, mit feurigen Lettern zu schreiben, wie ein alttestamentarischer Prophet seine Verwünschungen. (pp.115-116)

Dr. Spodeck is determined to continue writing his chronicle until his final day, in order to purge himself of all the shameful acts he claims he was unable to hinder. To this end, he also documents his own failings, in order that he might then claim the objectivity of the old chroniclers:

Bis zum Tage meines Todes aber will ich die Geschichte der Gemeinheit mit dem klaren, unbestechlichen Blick der alten Chronisten ohne Haß und Eifer weiterführen, damit, was ich nicht abwehren konnte, nicht durch mein Schweigen bestärkt wird und ich mitschuldig werde an unser aller Niedertracht. (p.117)

In attempting to abide by what he considers to be the duties of the chronicler and record his own failings and dishonourable actions, he aims to realise the impartial objectives of the chronicle. However, Dr. Spodeck's chronicle is not a chronicle in the sense in which Hein understands the term. In setting out to document the history of human evil it departs from the duties of the chronicler to commit the past to record whilst at the same time remaining detached from the evaluation of this past for the purposes of history. Dr. Spodeck's chronicle is based on a moral and ethical evaluation of the past in which the continuity of wickedness acts as the motivation behind the text. The impartiality which it claims for itself is undermined by this inherent bias. It contains, from Dr. Spodeck's own description, nothing which renders it useful for the future, as a diagnosis of social ills, for example. Indeed, its claim of affinity with the 'old chroniclers' can be derived only from the fact that it does not seek to offer an explanation for the past it records, preferring instead to document the evil actions of mankind as an example of the natural, human condition. Dr. Spodeck's chronicle yearns for a recognition which his own experience assures him is elusive.

His chronicle is the product of weakness and denial, which have been dominant traits in Dr. Spodeck's character throughout his life, preventing him from acting according to his own desires and convictions, forcing him to obey the will of his father, to deny his own interests, his study of psychology, his love for Christine, reflecting his masochistic self-hatred back onto society at large. His ultimate refuge lies in cynicism, which protects him from having to assume responsibility for his own actions.

The origin of Dr. Spodeck's bitterness, which as a doctor interested in psychiatry he recognises clearly, lies in the relationship with his father. His narrative records that it was his father who was responsible for bringing prosperity to Bad Guldenberg, and also used the town to amass a great fortune for himself. In the patriarchal figure of Dr. Böger, the narrative reveals a character who embodies the values of the capitalist past. In the world of Dr. Böger, people are reduced to the status of a commodity, possession of which belongs to him. Dr. Spodeck and his mother live in poverty, in contrast to the promiscuous life of luxury led by his father. Nevertheless, his influence is such that he is able to command continued respect from the victims of his actions.

This belief that he is accountable to no one enables him to behave as he chooses without the slightest sense of guilt or remorse. His children, of whom there are many, exist merely as a form of currency, a means of purchasing what he requires for the present. Dr Spodeck recalls the fate of one of his estranged brothers, who became a Nazi stormtrooper at his father's request in order for his father to buy political favour. The brother subsequently died an awful death. The course of Dr. Spodeck's own life has also been determined by his father's wishes. He has no say in his own future, abandoning at every turn his own desires in order to comply with his father's will. He gives up the study of psychology to continue as a student of medicine, and later resigns himself to a lifetime in Bad Guldenberg as part of the conditions of accepting the medical practice his father has bought for him. In a biblical allusion which reinforces the patriarchal nature of the relationship between father and son, Dr. Böger offers his son to the town of Bad Guldenberg as a sacrifice in atonement for his sins.

Furthering the theme of continuity in Dr. Spodeck's chronicle, he expresses regret in being unable to witness how his father would have manipulated the prevailing circumstances in the GDR after the defeat of fascism, and turned them to his own advantage. The skills which his father possessed would have been equally useful to him in the new political system, a remark which again reaffirms the connection between the past and the present:

Ich habe immer bedauert, daß mein Vater, der von der Stadt wie ein Heiliger geehrt wurde, vor dem Zusammenbruch starb und unter schwere schwarze Marmorblöcke verbracht wurde. Ich habe es bedauert, weil ich gern gesehen hätte, wie geschickt er die veränderten Umstände genützt hätte. Ich bin überzeugt, ich hätte seiner Dreistigkeit meine Hochachtung nicht versagen können. (p.115)

The future of Dr. Spodeck's chronicle is as hopeless as its vision. The three copies he vows to leave behind after his death - one copy each for the mayor, the museum curator and the priest - await an uncertain future. Nonetheless, he refuses to be deterred from his task, through which he derives a sense of purpose for an existence which is consumed by bitterness and regret. It is this bitterness which clouds his judgement, however, and undermines the value of his chronicle for the purpose of history and the hope of redemption through it. Indeed, Dr. Spodeck's chronicle is not concerned with the possibility of redemption at all, finding its inspiration instead in the desire for vengeance.

Against both the collapse of Kruschkatz' idealism into hopeless nihilism, and the cynicism of Dr. Spodeck, the text offers a third interpretation of history through the character of Horn. The fact that Horn does not acquire an independent, narrative voice in the text means that his understanding of history remains rather vaguely defined. It appears only directly at certain points in the text, through the recollection of conversations and events in which he was involved. The way in which the text offers revelations into Horn's character and opinions, however, serves to demonstrate Hein's own position with regard to the chronicle and to historical understanding. The imaginary dialogue between Thomas and Horn also reveals the actual practice through which historical understanding is acquired, and in turn reflects the author's considerations in respect of Benjamin's theoretical writings on history.

The fundamental premise which underlies Horn's understanding of history is revealed in a conversation with Thomas in the castle museum. Horn maintains that the only absolutes in historical inquiry are the concrete, physical materials themselves. He says of the exhibits stored under glass in the museum: 'Ein paar Steine, ein paar Scherben, aber die Wahrheit. Das ist nicht wenig, mein Junge.' (p.117)

Historical truth is embodied in the physical object which remains as its legacy. Yet the writing of history is essentially an interpretative strategy, and it is the responsibility of the chronicler to ensure that the historian has the necessary means at his disposal for the explanation of the past to proceed. Horn's position as revealed through Thomas makes the responsibilities of the chronicler clear. What the young Thomas cannot possibly comprehend, however, is the terrible weight of responsibility which the task entails:

'Es ist nur ein kleines Museum, das wir haben, und doch schreiben auch wir die Geschichte. Wir sind es, die dafür einzustehen haben, ob die Wahrheit oder die Lüge berichtet wird. Verstehst du das, Thomas?'

'Natürlich.'

'Nein, das verstehst du nicht. Die Wahrheit oder die Lüge, das ist eine entsetzliche Verantwortung. Wer das wirklich begriffen hätte, würde keinen Schlaf mehr finden.' (p.57)

Responsibility for the proper documentation of the past is an enormous burden, as Horn realises through his own experience. Not only does the collecting and recording of the past demand great discipline and devotion, the danger also exists that the truth, whenever and wherever it may be found, will contradict the interpretation of history



which political interests of the ruling class in society demands. Conversely, a political system can be measured by the response which it finds to the challenge represented by the past. As Horn is also aware, the truth he is seeking is of a very fragile and elusive nature. Furthermore, it is in essence temporary. The traces which it leaves behind in the form of physical fragments are the raw materials with which the inquiry into the past begins, the resulting text being a witness to the actual events of the past and offering the opportunity for their interpretation to begin. It is here in the text that the role of the chronicler and the historian merge into one. The historian as represented by the character Horn is at the same time acting as a chronicler by gathering the evidence of the past. At the same time the historian is aware of the magnitude and the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of his task. The fragments which constitute the trace of history are themselves scattered to infinity, and are part of a continuing process. Nevertheless, the historian is bound by a moral obligation to continue his quest for the truth about the past, for it is the knowledge acquired from this which forms the basis for understanding, and which will ultimately influence the course of the future. Here again, the influence of Benjamin's understanding of the role of the chronicler and the historical materialist as set out in the theses on history is in evidence. The chronicler collects the raw materials and records them without knowledge of or inquiry into their meaning. At this point the historical materialist is engaged, in an attempt to discover the correspondences in the past which will in turn reveal their meaning.

Ideology plays no role in Horn's search for the truth in history, as this would compromise the undertaking from the outset by determining the goal for which history must aim. Horn's antipathy towards Kruschkatz comes in part from the compromise with ideology which Kruschkatz makes. At the same time, Horn's refusal to compromise and remain true to the duties and responsibilities of the historian incurs the wrath of the state, costs him his job and his title, and ultimately his life.

The morality which supports Horn's undertaking is revealed in a conversation with Dr. Spodeck who, in attempting to discover the cause of Horn's despair, tries to encourage him to speak about his past. Horn rejects the need for a psychologist to help him with his problems. Dr. Spodeck draws Horn's attention to an article in a magazine on the effect of projecting a film onto a broken mirror, a variation on the

so-called Schüfftan technique. Dr. Spodeck's interest in the article is aroused in one respect by the possible application of this technique in the field of history:

'Von Interesse für mich war die hinter dieser technischen Spielerei steckende Idee, der möglich gewordene, schamlose Eingriff in eine bisher glaubwürdige Authentizität unserer Geschichtsschreibung. Das Ding hat Philosophie.[...]' (p.197)

The effect of projecting a film onto a broken mirror is to scatter the constituent images of that film in different directions. Breaking up the former, unified image in this way thus allows other images to be projected over the resulting blank spaces, creating the illusion of the unified, original film. Used in such a manner, images can be substituted for other images in order to create the desired impression, even if this impression, in the case of a documentary film, for example, does not represent the original recording of events. The potential of such a device when applied to historical writing delights the cynical Dr. Spodeck. Its power to distort and falsify records of actual events is seen by him as a device to undermine the basis for historical inquiry altogether.

Horn rejects Dr. Spodeck's assumptions. For Horn, the entire process of historical writing and historical understanding begins with falsification and misunderstanding. To borrow an image from Benjamin, the task is to liberate history from its shackles as one of the spoils in the triumphal procession of the victors of history, or the ruling class:

'Sie sehen zu schwarz, Dr. Spodeck. Was Sie als Fälschung bezeichnen, ist unser täglich Brot. Was ist denn Geschichte anderes als ein Teig von Überliefertem, von willkürlich oder absichtsvoll Erhaltenem, aus dem sich nachfolgende Generationen ein Bild nach ihrem Bilde kneten. Die Fälschungen und unsere Irrtümer sind der Kitt dieser Bilder, sie machen sie haltbar und griffig. Sie sind es, die unsere Weisheiten so einleuchtend machen.' (p.197)

Dr. Spodeck's professional interest in the device relates not so much to its application in connection with historical writing, but to the way in which the function of the machine resembles that of the mind. The parallels drawn between the human mind and film, whilst not inappropriate in his opinion, are nevertheless an incomplete picture of the actual functioning of the memory. He agrees that the mind recalls events in terms of pictorial images, and to this extent the workings of film and the mind are related. However, he is not satisfied with this explanation, because the mind is not at the same time capable of recording and recalling events accurately and completely in the same

way in which a film might do. It is the application of this variation of the Schüfftan device in film which explains the reason for Dr. Spodeck's scepticism in respect of earlier explanations for the working of the human mind. Images, he claims, are distorted by memory, which itself functions with the use of thousands of genetically determined 'mirrors'. What the mind recalls is not an actual event, but rather the interpretation of the event by the memory:

'Wir speichern nicht ein Geschehen, sondern unser Bewußtsein, unser Denken über ein Ereignis. Es sind persönliche Erinnerungen, was nicht weniger sagen will, als daß all unser Erinnern kein Bild der Welt liefert, sondern ein durch das Spiegelkabinett unseres Kopfes entworfenen Puzzle jenes Bildes mit unseren individuellen Verspiegelungen, Auslassungen und Einfügungen. Das mag als Bild der Welt erscheinen und dient uns auch als Weltbild, in Wahrheit ist es allein eine Darstellung unseres Bewußtseins, wie wir den gebrochenen Spiegel unseres Gehirns zu nennen pflegen.' (p.198)

This important differentiation between recollection, the mind and the memory gives reason to doubt the authenticity of the recollected event. For Dr. Spodeck this calls into question the validity of the whole purpose of historical writing, given that it can now be reduced merely to an interpretative strategy founded on the process of recollection.

Sibylle Cramer likens the structure of the novel itself to a documentary film, a deliberate construction of the author, who acts to suppress the individual voices in the text, which then as a result of reconstruction, becomes a montage. The fragmentation of the narratives places the reader in the position of providing an interpretation for the text:

Übrig bleibt ein sehr genauer Dokumentarfilm, den Horn so langsam abkurbelt, daß seine Zusammengesetztheit deutlich hervortritt. Die Abläufe werden unterbrochen, das Bildmaterial rhythmisiert. Mit Mehrfachbelichtungen, Kontrasten, Überblendungen entsteht eine Montage, die den linearen Zusammenhang durch einen weitwinkligen Aufriß ergänzt. Hier, an den Haltepunkten des Romans, wo die Uhr steht, findet ein penibler Selbstkommentar des Textes statt, eine offene Kontroverse, in die der Leser hineingezogen wird, weil der Roman ihm die Entscheidung überläßt.<sup>8</sup>

Cramer states that Hein points to the manner in which events are recorded in the memory, the way they are repressed, distorted and manipulated, in order to justify his 'filmic' style of writing. It becomes apparent that the style and the content of the

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<sup>8</sup> Sibylle Cramer, p.6.

novel are mutually dependant. Furthermore, the particular style of *Horns Ende*, with its adoption of the montage technique as opposed to a more linear form of portrayal of events, is another example of the author's interest in the ideas of Walter Benjamin. Hein shares Benjamin's interest in Surrealist art and the techniques of montage. The linear progression of the narrative is undermined by the technique of montage, which substitutes associative constellations in its place.

The argument which Dr. Spodeck puts forward, and which he finds so compelling, against the reliability of memory as a consequence of the nature of the mechanics of the mind and recollection, is anathema to Horn. Dr. Spodeck also sees the danger in undermining the status of memory, and accepts the impossibility of life without it. However, he tries to encourage Horn not to place absolute faith in the value of memory, in the hope that his past will cease to trouble him:

'Nein, das wäre unsinnig, weil es uns nicht möglich ist. Ich rate Ihnen nur, Ihren Erinnerungen zu mißtrauen. Wenn Ihr Gedächtnis Sie zum Leben unfähig macht, ist es vernünftiger, Sie bezweifeln einige gespeicherte Bilder in Ihrem Kopf und nicht das Leben. Es ist vernünftiger, denn, wie ich hoffe bewiesen zu haben, wir haben keine Gewißheit darüber, daß diese Erinnerungen uns nicht gründlich täuschen.' (p.199)

Dr. Spodeck advises Horn in effect to consciously repress memories which create difficulties for him, on the basis that he cannot be certain that the past is how he remembers it. Once again, similarities appear between aspects of the novel and the novella *Drachenblut*. Claudia's deliberate repression of memory as a strategy for survival in the present is advocated by Dr. Spodeck in respect of Horn.

Horn accepts the validity of Dr. Spodeck's arguments insofar as they relate to the functions of the mind and memory, yet this merely confirms the difficulty of the task of the chronicler to which he has been appointed. Indeed, Dr. Spodeck's arguments in relation to the function of the memory in the context of historical writing, cast in doubt the validity and authenticity of his chronicle of the evil of humanity. Far from being able to claim for itself the status of impartially observed narrative of the despicable affairs of the citizens of Bad Guldenberg, the objectivity of which has already been shown to be questionable, Dr. Spodeck's chronicle becomes merely another unreliable, subjective account of history. He is also troubled by the past, and his chronicle bears witness to his inability to mistrust his own memory, choosing instead to seek revenge through his document. Horn, by contrast, points to the moral



issue at stake in defence of memory. To reject memory as the criterion against which to judge the present also means to reject experience, knowledge and values, the whole area of mental life which sets mankind apart from other animals:

‘Vielleicht haben Sie recht, aber wir werden mit unserem Gedächtnis leben müssen. Welch ein entsetzlicher Gedanke, ohne Gedächtnis leben zu wollen. Wir würden ohne Erfahrungen leben müssen, ohne Wissen und ohne Werte. Löschen Sie das Gedächtnis eines Menschen, und Sie löschen die Menschheit.’ (p.199)

The ability to survive and succeed in society is based on compromise and the repression of memory, which conflicts with the role of the chronicler, whose task and duty it is to record events as they are, and not as they may be required to appear for the benefit of a particular point of view. Dr. Spodeck's response to Horn's defence of memory is to view both positions as extremes. Memory should not be divested of all significance, and neither should it be exalted to the absolute standard against which judgement is made. The experience which forms the basis for memory is inexhaustible:

‘Hüten wir uns aber auch vor der anderen Übertreibung: unser so fragwürdiges Gedächtnis zum absoluten Maß zu erheben. Es würde uns unfähig machen zu leben. Mißtrauen wir uns selbst. Der Hochmut des Verstandes hat keinen Humor. Unsere Erfahrungen sind unvollständig. Unsere Erinnerungen haben die Lücken und Risse des gebrochenen Spiegels. Das Fehlende ergänzen wir unbewußt nach unserer beschränkten Einsicht und laufen Gefahr, uns zu verirren.’ (p.199)

The task of the historian becomes increasingly impossible, in that it is limited to empirical means which themselves are shown to be questionable. They nevertheless remain the only means at the historian's disposal. Their denial would render life completely meaningless, a devastating realisation which Horn is unable to accept:

Horn lachte leise und anhaltend vor sich hin. Er schüttelte sich vor Lachen, als hätte ich einen grandiosen Witz gerissen, und hatte Mühe, mir zu antworten: ‘Doktor, dann ist das Leben nichts als ein Haufen vergoldeter Scheiße.’ (p.199)

All that remains is hope through history, in spite of history, as Hein points out in his *Kunstwerkaufsatz*. In support of this hope comes the act of remembering. Remembering has a strong, moral basis on which hope is founded. Emphasis is placed on the act of remembering itself, as opposed to the questionable reliability of memory. It is through this affirmation of the act of remembering that the element of hope in the text is derived. Once more, the affinities which the text shares with the ideas of Benjamin come to the fore. Benjamin's *Kunstwerkaufsatz* raises the importance of the actual process of artistic production as a means of overcoming the aura of the work of

art, that is to say, that which defines its value in the bourgeois world. Its value in the context of history and historical writing is, on the one hand, to challenge the dogmatic approach characteristic of GDR historical writing, which reduces the past to a tool of ideology, and on the other hand, to offer a counterbalance, in part moral, to the nihilism which underlies the assault on the absolute value of memory. The act of remembering, in spite of the elusiveness of the truth which it attempts to uncover, is essential in the defence of the morality which is a prerequisite for continued faith in the future of human society.

Each chapter of the novel opens with an imaginary dialogue between the now middle-aged Thomas and the dead Horn. Even in death, Horn exhorts Thomas to remember the past:

- Erinnere dich.
- Ich versuche es.
- Du mußt dich erinnern.
- Es ist lange her. Jahre sind vergangen.
- Du kannst es nicht vergessen haben. Es war gestern. (p.5)

The novel begins with this call to remember, to release the repressed memories of the past. It is Thomas' conscience which has invoked the figure of the dead Horn, as it confronts the uncomfortable reality of the past:

- Wieso ich? Warum haben Sie mich ausgesucht?
- Ich habe dich nicht ausgesucht. Das warst du selbst.
- Wenn Sie keinen Frieden haben, lassen Sie mir meinen Frieden.
- Hast du es immer noch nicht begriffen, Junge? Du bist es, der mit den Toten nicht leben kann. Du bist es, der darüber reden muß. Die Toten haben euch vergessen, aber ihr könnt uns nicht vergessen. (p.165)

The essence of Horns philosophy, which in the particular context of the novel proved to be his undoing, is spoken by the dead Horn in one of the imaginary dialogues with Thomas. It reveals the moral foundation on which the call to remember the past is based. It can hold no promise of revelation, but it is, as the author himself has claimed, the only human hope which remains:

- Was lebt, ist vergänglich. Wir müssen alle sterben und werden vergessen.
- Falsch, ganz falsch. Das sind abgeschmackte Dummheiten. Solange es ein menschliches Gedächtnis gibt, wird nichts umsonst gewesen sein, ist nichts vergänglich. (p.125)

As Horn points out to Thomas, so long as the human memory remains, nothing from the past will disappear. The object is rather to hold on to the recollection as it appears

in the present, the vital moment at which correspondences in the past can be established and the understanding of history can begin.

The moral act of remembering in the novel is set against the backdrop of a society which is permeated by ideas and values from the past. Bad Guldenberg represents a microcosm of GDR society, in which moral values are either fundamentally those of the past or are absent altogether. Through the character of Thomas' father, a morality which has its origins in bourgeois socialisation finds expression and acceptance within the new, political system. Thomas' father is representative of patriarchal power and bourgeois hypocrisy. The manner in which he is portrayed, through the voice of the young Thomas, leaves him with no redeeming qualities. Thomas, as well as his mother and brother, are the most immediate victims of the strict, disciplinary regime which he imposes on their daily life.

Thomas' father thrives on the status and reputation he has acquired through his profession. He uses this as an instrument to command the respect and subordination of others in every aspect of his life. As a reflection of his social position, he expects his sons to behave in a manner becoming to his status:

Vater sprach gern über seinen Beruf. Sein Studium und die Apotheke waren der Stolz seines Lebens, der in Erfüllung gegangene Traum eines Bauernjungen. Und er erwartete von seinen Söhnen, daß sie sich ihres Vaters würdig erweisen. Die Söhne des Apothekers. (p.121)

His obsession with status is accompanied by a ritual form of behaviour, the purpose of which is intended to emphasise his position in society. He displays the hypocritical, bourgeois disdain for money, in that he refuses to accept it in his own home when it is offered in return for medicines supplied after shop hours. Instead, he obliges the customer to return to the pharmacy the following day to pay for the medicine, an act which confirms his standing in society.

Ingrained class attitudes, which are apparent in the behaviour of others when dealing with Thomas' father, prevail in spite of the different political circumstances which exist in the socialist society. The social and political attitudes of the bourgeois past are revealed through the character of Thomas' father in numerous ways; through his refusal to involve himself in politics, his distinction between visitors to the spa town and new residents living on the housing estate, and his observance of strict codes of

behaviour. His attitude is summarised in his approach to Herr Gohl, whose wife became a victim of the Nazi campaign to exterminate the mentally ill and physically deformed, when she substituted herself in place of her daughter after a resident from the town informed the authorities of the daughter's existence. The moral reprehensibility of bourgeois hypocrisy is laid bare when Thomas' father's concerns with the observance of ritual is revealed. He greets Herr Gohl in the park on his Sunday afternoon stroll as a mark of sympathy for the grotesque catastrophe which was inflicted upon his family under the Nazi dictatorship, because it is, as he says, the done thing. This comment at the same time denies a responsibility for the fate of the Gohl family. Yet, as the text shows, this responsibility clearly lies with the town as a whole; the same town, the identity of which, the pharmacist laments, is changing beyond recognition.

Gertrude Fischlinger recalls the change of mood in the town from one of relief at Marlene's deportation to that of mute horror as the news of the death of Gudrun Gohl becomes known:

Wie ein Hagelschlag, eisig und alles vernichtend, traf diese Nachricht unsere kleine Stadt. Die Erleichterung, die nach der Denunziation und dem vermeintlichen Transport der Kranken in die Anstalt zu bemerken war, schlug nun um in stummes Entsetzen. Wann immer man Herrn Gohl sah oder unvermutet auf seine Familie zu sprechen kam, machte sich lähmendes Schweigen breit, als habe sich plötzlich eine lichtlose Dunkelheit über die Stadt gelegt. Und die Scham und der Schrecken waren so nachhaltig, daß über ein Jahr, bis zum Ende des Krieges, Herr Gohl und seine Tochter unbelästigt in ihrem Haus wohnen konnten. Obgleich viele in der Stadt die Wahrheit wußten, wagte es keiner, sie laut auszusprechen. Selbst unter den eifrigsten Nazis mußte es Leute gegeben haben, die vom Tod der schönen Gudrun Gohl und dem unerlaubten Weiterleben der schwachsinnigen Marlene wußten, doch auch sie öffneten nicht mehr ihren Mund. (p.158)

The guilt which the townspeople share in the murder of Gudrun Gohl is made a constant reminder to them by the manner in which Herr Gohl and Marlene continue to live apart from society. They are among the victims of the crimes of the Nazis and the inhumanity of society. That they cannot bring themselves to participate in society even after the defeat of fascism and the establishment of the GDR is confirmation of the fact that the people who populate the town remain the same. This is supported by the reaction of the townspeople to Herr Gohl's befriending of the gypsies:

Daß Herr Gohl sich mit den ungebetenen Gästen einließ, empfand fast die ganze Stadt als Verrat, und das anfängliche Bedauern seines schweren Schicksals und ein gewisses Verständnis für das einsiedlerische Leben des alten Malers wichen bald der Verärgerung



über sein unzugängliches Wesen und einer offenen Mißbilligung seiner rätselhaften Beziehung zu den Zigeunern. (p.159)

Old prejudices are quickly reawakened by the arrival of the gypsies in Bad Guldenberg, and the bond which forms between the gypsies and Herr Gohl and his daughter is considered an act of betrayal by the townspeople. The lessons of the past have not been learned and attitudes from the past continue to survive in the present as one of the consequences of the complete absence of discussion of this legacy. Instead, a collective act of repression prevails, which is made more difficult by the actions of Herr Gohl. In the event, the horror with which the townspeople initially greet the news of Gudrun Gohl's murder is replaced by anger and disapproval. The attitude of Thomas' father towards Herr Gohl exemplifies the continuity of this bourgeois socialisation, with all its political and moral implications:

Mein Vater grüßte ihn stets im Vorbeigehen, ohne je eine Antwort zu erhalten. Wenn wir einige Meter weitergegangen waren, pflegte er zu sagen: 'Ein bedauernswerter Mensch.' Oder er sagte: 'Schlimm, schlimm, und er war so begabt.'  
Dann drehte er sich nach uns um und fragte mit schmalen Lippen: 'Habt ihr ihn begrüßt? - Das gehört sich auch so.'  
Danach sagte er stets noch ein paar Worte leise zu Mutter, und wir gingen weiter. (p.30)

Thomas reveals the hypocrisy which underlies his father's public appearance with the discovery of a hidden collection of pornographic magazines in his father's study. The public facade of the respectable, professional man crumbles with the revelation of this secret about his father's private life. Thomas recognises the importance of his discovery, even if its significance at this point in time escapes him.

The female characters of Hein's novel in particular are the victims of the abiding, patriarchal structures which survive in the young GDR society. In each case they are portrayed as the submissive victims of male authority. Thomas' mother does not question the authority of her husband, and Juliane, the closest friend of Gertrude Fischlinger, finds herself so infatuated by the priest for whom she works as a domestic that she is overtaken by his words and ideas. Christian acts of charity become a cover for her willing subordination to Father Geßling, to the extent that she appears to want to take on his personality as her own. Moreover, women are not only the victims of patriarchy as a result of their mental or emotional subjugation by men, they also suffer acts of physical violence and abuse.

Gertrude Fischlinger suffers at the hands of both her husband and her son. Like all the other victims, she is reduced to the status of an object, or commodity. On her wedding night, her husband pays no attention to her physical discomfort and forces himself upon her, in order to claim what he considers to be his conjugal rights.

Through the institution of marriage she is reduced to the status of her husband's possession and subject to his will. Not only is she left to face the shame of returning the torn and blood-stained wedding veil to Juliane's mother after the wedding night, she is also forced to endure the gossip of the townspeople after her husband leaves her, before the birth of their son, to live with another woman. Gertrude Fischlinger's short account of her life with her husband offers no explanation of any emotional attachment between the two. The underlying atmosphere of her narrative is one of naiveté, sadness and betrayal, and oppressive resignation in response to the continual humiliation she faces. Divorce nevertheless does not exist as a possibility for her. She claims not to know why she does not seek a divorce, and later admits to the fact that she does not recognise the need. What becomes apparent, however, is the absence of the belief in the possibility of another alternative to the life she has. Her resignation is born of a voicelessness and powerlessness when confronted by the violence of male authority. She remains trapped in her traditional role as a woman, and sees no opportunity to escape.

Eventually, she manages to persuade her husband to leave the town with his new woman, in order that she might escape the crippling humiliation. Even then, her husband manages to exact a price for this concession, namely the financial responsibility for his son. The departure of her husband leaves her simultaneously in a state of happiness and despair:

*Ich war nie glücklicher verzweifelt und habe nie erleichterter in mein Laken geheult, als in jenem Jahr, in dem er endlich und für immer fortging. (p.48)*

The humiliation which Gertrude Fischlinger suffers from her husband also contains an element of ritual which characterises the behaviour of Thomas' father and Dr. Böger. The reason for her inability to confront the tyranny of her husband is not stated. It is not for religious reasons that she refuses to seek a divorce, and not for love of her husband that she submits to his demands. Nevertheless, her attitude towards her husband and her son are dictated by fear and resignation. She is a stereotypical victim

of both physical and psychological male violence. The return of her husband, some years later, accompanied by his most recent girlfriend, reveals the continuity in the cycle of sexual violence and oppression. In his new girlfriend Gertrude recognises the one characteristic which both women share, namely their willingness to allow themselves to be dominated by men:

Ich sah die unablässig auf meinen Mann gerichteten Augen, ich bemerkte die leise und stetige Bewegung ihrer Hände und die häufigen und schnellen Bekundungen ihrer Zustimmung zu allem, was mein Mann erzählte. Wenn es etwas gab, worin sie mir glich, so war es das still leidende Glück und die unterwürfige Bereitschaft für die Liebkosung oder den Schlag, die mein Mann auch mich in der kurzen Zeit unserer Ehe nachhaltig gelehrt hatte. (p.174)

Gertrude's relationship with her lodger, Horn, in contrast to that with her husband, is marked by courtesy and gratitude. However, with the exception of a brief involvement, borne out of physical need rather than love, Horn's attitude towards her is polite, but nevertheless cold and detached. They share the same home for almost four years, yet remain as strangers to one another. Horn's suicide becomes the signal for release for Gertrude. Coupled with the departure of her son and the final visit of her husband, she is now free from the immediate influence of men. This brings the possibility of renewal and hope, and fills Gertrude with a new desire for life. It is also one of the rare moments of genuine optimism in the novel:

In jenem Jahr, in dem Herr Horn beerdigt wurde und ich meinen Mann ein letztes Mal wiedersehen mußte, in jenem Jahr, in dem mein Sohn auszog und mich verließ, um niemals wieder nach Guldenberg zu kommen, fühlte ich hinter aller Trauer und den dummen Tränen eines alten Weibes, wie mein Herz zu atmen begann. Die eisernen Ringe, die es ein Leben lang zusammengepreßt hatten, lösten sich langsam und unmerklich und eröffneten mir einen nie gekannten, unendlich freien Raum. Und während ich mir unter Tränen sagte, daß ich nun die Waise meines Sohnes und die Witwe meines Untermieters sei, verspürte ich trotz meiner schmerzenden Beine in mir die Kraft und unbezähmbare Lust zu leben, und mir war, als schwebte ich in eine lichtlose und dennoch sehr helle Ferne. (p.175)

With the physical removal of the male characters in her life, Gertrude Fischlinger experiences the feeling of release from the constraints imposed upon her by the behavioural patterns of patriarchal society. She is unsure where her liberation will lead her, insofar as she is unaware of the possibilities which exist for her beyond the model of patriarchy. Nevertheless, the image remains one of hope in the possibilities of regeneration in the context of a narrative of despair.

The concerns of the novel *Horns Ende* extend beyond the simple production of historical case-studies of different character types in society. The scope of the text is much broader, drawing the reader into an analysis of the contradictions within GDR society in the early 1950's through the medium of the fragmented narratives. In turn, these narratives reveal the existence of patterns of thought and behaviour from the past which have been integrated into the new, political reality of the present, and the problems which arise from it. As was also the case in *Drachenblut*, it is in the absence of a proper consideration of the past and its relationship to the present where the tension of the text lies.

The novel deals with the question of the recording of the past by setting conflicting examples of historical understanding against each other, through the characters of Dr. Spodeck, Kruschkatz and Horn. In this way, Hein directly addresses the concept of the chronicle and the understanding of the role of the chronicler. In the case of Kruschkatz' understanding of history, his original position as an apologist for the practice of historical expediency in the attempt to realise ideological goals, is undermined by his experience of life in the GDR and by the compromises which he makes against his own principles. His final position is one of despair and reveals a rejection of history altogether. Dr. Spodeck's concern is with the writing of a history of human baseness, in which he records all the vile acts of the townspeople in what he refers to as a chronicle. Yet his view of history is also one-sided, inspired by the suffering he was forced to endure at the hands of his father, and motivated by a desire for vengeance. The third position is represented by Horn. Horn's task, as the text reveals through the various narratives, lies in accordance with the duties of the chronicler. His purpose is to gather and record events of the past, without bias, so that they may be used by the historian for the process of explanation.

Society in the novel is permeated by a morality which has its roots in the past. It is against these structures from the past that the act of remembering is introduced, through the imaginary dialogue between Horn and Thomas. The act of remembering points to a practice whereby the past can be recovered from repression in the memory of the individual and used as a tool with which to analyse and question reality in the present. It is through the act of remembering that hope in the future and the underlying motivation of the novel lies.



## Chapter 5

### Der Tangospieler

‘Ich habe gelernt, daß der gerade Weg das Labyrinth ist’, says a pipe fitter to the thirty six year old historian Hans-Peter Dallow in Hein's third, major prose work, *Der Tangospieler*.<sup>1</sup> The remark is made during a discussion in a bar on the nature of the world, and occurs after Dallow's release from prison for his part in a student cabaret, which included an altered rendition of an old tango, aimed at slandering the head of state, Walter Ulbricht. Dallow is asked his opinion on the nature of the world, and responds by claiming that existence is a purely optical phenomenon. His observation refutes any claim to philosophy, founded instead on what he considers to be a scientific truth:

[...] ‘Nehmen Sie den Satz physikalisch oder biologisch oder chemisch oder wie Sie wollen, nur nicht philosophisch. Es ist eine ganz einfache Wahrheit, dazu braucht keine Philosophie. Wenn das große Licht ausgeschaltet wird, ist hier nichts mehr. Alle Existenz ist an das Licht gebunden und existiert insofern nicht wirklich. Ist nur ein Lichtspiel, ein Phänomen der Optik wie das Kino. Und was sind Lichtspiele und Wasserspiele, ein Zeitvertreib aus Nichts. Man dreht am Schalter, und was bleibt? Eine dunkle Leinwand und ein trübes, sich schnell glättendes Wasser. Das ist alles.’ (p.90)

Dallow's argument denies the reality of substance, claiming that behind the illusion created by light there is nothing except a dark screen and a dull, still body of water. The pipe fitter takes his own philosophy from Schopenhauer, whose work is the only thing he reads because, as he claims, everything he could wish to know is contained within it. Both commentaries are denials of the idea of progress, regarding reality either as an illusion, the value of which lies only in entertainment, or as impenetrable and misleading. At the same time, they are both critical statements in respect of historical understanding in the GDR. Dallow's understanding of the world can be regarded as an extreme refutation of materialism, and the pipe fitter offers an interpretation of the world which rejects the causality of progress, the straight path.

The narrative plot of *Der Tangospieler* follows the course of Dallow's life from the moment of his unfortunate involvement in the student cabaret and subsequent trial and

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<sup>1</sup> Christoph Hein, *Der Tangospieler* (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1989), p.2. [Further references are given after quotations in the text]

imprisonment to his rehabilitation at the institute where he was formerly employed. In this way, it reflects the philosophy of the pipe fitter, that the straight path is a labyrinth. Before his misfortune, Dallow led the secure and comfortable existence of an aspiring academic and historian, content with the privileges of his position. His career path was well-defined, and his future clearly mapped out for him. As an academic, Dallow conformed to the role expected of him as an employee of the state. His doctoral thesis concerned the printing and smuggling of illegal, social democratic newspapers across Lake Constance in the previous century, as well as the heroic resistance of the workers and artisans of Prague in the face of the Windischgrätz bombardment. As such, it observed in its subject matter the official requirements for historical writing in the GDR, contributing to the history of the struggle for socialism. By an element of chance, however, Dallow's life is suddenly thrown into turmoil after his arrest for his involvement in the student cabaret. From this moment on, he embarks on a labyrinthine journey of self-vindication, in an attempt to prove his innocence in respect of the charge made against him, for which he was imprisoned, and as a protest against the political system which condemned him.

Once again, the main theme of *Der Tangospieler*, which follows Hein's earlier works *Drachenblut* and *Horns Ende*, is the author's continuing preoccupation with history in its specific GDR context. *Der Tangospieler* is set during the politically turbulent period of the late 1960's, beginning in 1966 with Dallow's arrest and culminating in 1968 with an account of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact, which included soldiers from the GDR. This period also marks the adoption by the GDR of its own, written constitution of 6th April 1968, which came into effect on 9th April of that year. It is against this concrete historical background that the events of the text unfold.

1989, the year in which *Der Tangospieler* was published, was a year of enormous social upheaval in the GDR, which brought to an end the authority of the SED as the ruling political party. The following year saw the re-unification of the two German states. The historical significance of the statement in the 'Programm der SED', ratified by the 6th Party Conference on 18th January 1963, that the era of Socialism and the first phase of Communism in the GDR had begun, followed by the proclamation at the

7th Party Conference from 17th to 22nd April 1967 that an advanced socialist system in the GDR had been established, was shown to be an illusion.

The historical background to *Der Tangospieler* is the era when such proclamations by the Central Committee of the SED regarding the development of the GDR socialism were made. Both Hein's previous longer prose works focus on taboo subjects in GDR history, from the legacy of the Nazi past and the change-over from Capitalism to Communism to the suppression of the workers' revolt in June 1953. In *Der Tangospieler* Hein uses the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia as the historical backdrop against which Dallow's personal story unfolds. For Hein, the invasion of Czechoslovakia on 20th August 1968 by 400,000 troops from Warsaw Pact countries, including the GDR, in order to crush the anti-Stalinist reform movement, led by Alexander Dubcek, was arguably one of the most significant single events to undermine the credibility of the SED dictatorship during the 41 year history of the GDR. It was this event which proved that the Soviet system as a whole was not only lacking in any recognisable virtue, but that it was also irredeemable. It deprived the state of what remaining moral legitimacy it might still have possessed. In a speech given on 6th May 1990 in Vienna to commemorate the award of the Erich Fried Prize, Hein comments:

Die Frage, ob das sowjetische System reformierbar war, ist letztlich nicht oder nur spekulativ beantwortbar. Für mich hatte es seinen Abschluß im August 1968 erreicht, als die Panzer der Warschauer-Pakt-Staaten in Prag einrollten und jene Reform, die für uns mit dem Namen Dubcek verbunden ist, beendeten.<sup>2</sup>

Through the character of Dallow, Hein continues his examination of the theme of the historian in crisis. However, Dallow does not face the same moral dilemma as the character Racine in the short story *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois*, neither does his understanding of history and the role of the historian resemble that embodied in the figure of Horn in the novel *Horns Ende*. The difference between Dallow and the historians Horn and Racine has its basis in the understanding of the duties of the chronicler and historian. Dallow compromises himself as an historian by subjugating history to the ideological requirements of the state. Neither does this compromise in respect of the duties and responsibilities of the historian develop out of cynical

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<sup>2</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Unbelehrbar - Erich Fried', in *Christoph Hein. Texte, Daten, Bilder*, p.25.

disillusion, as a result of the experience of the paradoxes within GDR society. Rather, Dallow's compromise represents an attitude towards history which is already inherent within society.

Racine's compromise with regard to the writing and recording of history comes about through fear of the capricious will of the absolutist state. The anguish and torment which Racine experiences as a result of this weakness on his part is altogether absent in the character of Dallow. Dallow's approach to his duties as an historian, even before his internment, is such that he does not share the conviction in the principles on which historical understanding in the GDR was based. His work at the institute is described as boring and repetitive, and his enthusiasm as cynical and false. He is overcome by disinterest in his profession. Nevertheless, he still performs his duties as an historian in the service of the state:

Diese müde Herablassung, mit der er Studenten zuhörte, beifällig nickend oder die Augen verdrehend, für alle offensichtlich leidend unter dem Unmaß von Schwachsinn, den anzuhören er genötigt war. Die Verachtung, mit der er ein Lob erteilte, eine Leistung wohlwollend aufnahm oder eine wochenlange Bemühung nachsichtig akzeptierte. Und die sich jedes Jahr wiederholenden Fragen der Studenten, naive, liebe Fragen nach allen möglichen Welträtseln, jeder Satz eine Weltanschauung, gläubige Bekundungen einer noch ungekränkten Hoffnung, die grundsätzliche, alles umfassende Erklärungen erwartete. Und die Antworten, wollte er sich verständlich machen, mußten etwas von diesem hochpolierten Strahlenglanz haben. Erfahrungen waren da nicht hilfreich, sie wirkten irritierend, resignativ, zynisch. Also verkniff er sich jede sarkastische Bemerkung und nickte mit gleichfalls leuchtenden Augen. Die Mundwinkel schmerzten vom alles überglitzernden Lächeln. Wieviel Disziplin und Nachsicht war doch notwendig, um sich in jedem Jahr für solche Dummheiten herzugeben. Und wieviel Hochmut. (p.32)

The preoccupation of the text with the theme of history is again much in evidence in the text, to the extent that one critic, Uwe Wittstock, accuses Hein of having written for the third time the same book.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, however, there are also notable differences between *Der Tangospieler* and Hein's earlier works, *Drachenblut* and *Horns Ende*. Perhaps the most striking difference to be found in *Der Tangospieler* is the shift in narratorial stance, from the introspection of first person narration to an attempted broadening and objectification of vision by means of a third person narrator, making it, as Uwe Wittstock claims, his first epic novel.

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<sup>3</sup> Uwe Wittstock, 'Kammerkonzert mit Trillerpfeife. Die Talente und die Untugenden des Christoph Hein', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 May 1989.



In spite of the significance of the events surrounding the forceful repression of reform in Czechoslovakia, these appear mainly as a background to the account of Dallow's personal story. This is in keeping with the stylistic technique employed by Hein in both *Drachenblut* and *Horns Ende*, creating a historical backdrop or context against which personal histories unfold. Wittstock's critique draws analogies between the author's concerns as a dramatist and the influence of this dramatic quality on his prose style.

According to Wittstock, the third person narrative acts as a counter to the more theatrical tendencies of what he refers to as 'Rollenprosa'. He claims that Hein does not narrate events, but allows his characters to express themselves through the means of long inner monologues. The third person narrative attempts to objectify the account of Dallow's life after his release from prison. It functions in a similar manner to the eye of the camera, impartially recording events as it comes across them, allowing the reader the opportunity to judge both Dallow and the society in which he lives against each other. However, the camera eye of Hein's text does not function in this way. Instead of a wide-angle view of the events portrayed in the text, the myopic eye of the camera focuses on the character of Dallow, to the extent that the camera eye becomes Dallow's own, seeing only what he sees and recording only his own experiences. Myopic vision performs the function of theatrical drama. As a narrative device, it is employed in order to increase the tension in the text between the internal world of Dallow and the external world of GDR society, revealing the discord between the two. The training of the camera eye on Dallow produces drama by allowing events to appear suddenly and unexpectedly in the narrative. However, the text does not abandon the theatrical completely in favour of the cinematographic, surrendering itself, as Wittstock points out, in moments of weakness to outbursts of poetic fancy. At the same time, the camera eye relinquishes critical responsibility, becoming an additional organ of Dallow's self pity. The conflicting interests of cinema and drama represent a weakness in the text, reducing the balancing influence of context in the course of Dallow's selfish lament.

In *Der Tangospieler* Hein nevertheless produces an interesting and challenging perspective from which to consider the actual historical events which underlie the text. The emphasis is not on the growing mood for reform, nor on the activities of

dissidents which are generally associated with this period in history, but on the life of a man who is at heart a conformist. It is in this way that Hein attempts to re-question history, by presenting the reader with images which are not typically associated with the events they portray. It is through this challenge to the understanding of history that the text functions as a chronicle. The impartiality of the chronicler requires him to record the past in such a way as to allow all arguments to appear, in equal balance with one another. Through the character of Dallow, Hein presents a picture of society in which the state exercises complete control over the individual. It is the attitude which Dallow represents which allows the wilful actions of the state. Dallow's attempt to seek justice for what he considers to be his wrongful conviction and imprisonment is not motivated by ideological conviction, merely by self-interest. Not only does the text challenge historical perceptions by concentrating on the character of a conformist, it also places the character in an unfamiliar position, making him the unfortunate and accidental victim of a legal system which reflects the sensitivity of the state to criticism. *Der Tangospieler* represents a portrayal of socialist society in which repression has become the accepted way of dealing with the past. The fact that Dallow seeks to question this past in relation to one specific event merely serves to emphasise the extent to which repression of the past has become the accepted norm.

Wittstock argues that it is not Hein's main concern to demonstrate how quickly and easily a stubborn intellectual can be transformed by the authorities into an enemy of the state. Rather, it is the character's re-assimilation into a closed, notoriously self-righteous society which is of interest to him.

Little insight is offered into Dallow's intellectual life during his time at the Historical Institute. Instead, the text reveals a man who is bored and unconvinced by the ideas he is obliged to disseminate, but who nevertheless chooses to follow the path of least resistance. Indeed, it is doubtful whether Dallow has an alternative point of view to put forward at all. He is an historian with little or no dedication to his work, his only interest being the pursuit of gratification in the present. Dallow's generation bridges the gap between the era of *Horns Ende* and *Drachenblut*. It reveals the transition from the early disillusionment with socialist ideals to the boredom and hopelessness which characterise everyday life in the GDR in the 1980s.

Dallow's behaviour on his return to the institute after his release from prison, for a meeting with his former colleague and now director, Roessler, epitomises his previous approach to life. On arrival, Dallow meets Sylvia, his most recent lover and also one of his students. His reaction upon seeing Sylvia is registered simply in terms of sexual desire:

Er wollte sofort mit Sylvia schlafen. Er wollte ihr hier im Treppenhaus des Universitätsgebäudes die Hand unter den dicken Mantel und die Kleider schieben, ihre Brust streicheln, ihre Haut anfassen und dann rasch mit ihr irgendwohin gehen, sie ausziehen und mit ihr schlafen. Er starrte auf das kleine weiße Stück ihres Halses, das über dem Wollschal zu sehen war. Einundzwanzig Monate, dachte er, das müßte auch für sie reizvoll sein. (p.28)

His lust is not reciprocated, and he soon realises that life in the institute has progressed without him. The easy arrogance with which he was previously able to assert himself appears divest of appeal now that Dallow no longer commands the position of authority he once had. In his absence and without his favouritism, Sylvia has attained the position of assistant at the institute. Sylvia's advancement takes him by surprise, and instinctively leads him to conclude that she must have turned her affections towards his successor, Roessler. His injured pride turns to spite at the thought that Roessler has now acquired the privileges which Dallow considered by right to be his. His loss of status is compounded by the fact that Sylvia is now in a position to offer him help and assistance. His resistance at the thought of returning to work at the institute is an egotistical reaction to protect this wounded pride.

Karl-Heinz Götze refers to the idea of 'mitspielen', as Dallow describes his involvement with the student cabaret, as in many respects symbolic of the way in which he has led his life.<sup>4</sup> Having played in accordance with the rules, he now feels that society has unjustly turned against him, and that he has a right to vindication. He is now both unwilling and unable to accept that he has a diminished status in society, and that he is still subject to the will of the state.

Imprisonment separates Dallow's past from his future. The routine monotony of prison life destroys his ability to think clearly, and the inevitable self-preoccupation of his thoughts reach no meaningful conclusion, to the extent that he makes a conscious

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<sup>4</sup> Karl-Heinz Götze, 'Windflüchter. Christoph Heins Roman "Der Tangospieler"', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 July 1989, p.4.

decision to wait until his release before beginning once more to contemplate his position:

Es gab keinen sinnvollen Entschluß zu fassen, keine seiner Überlegungen hatte eine praktische Folge, und so blieb es nicht aus, daß sich auch seine Gedanken verwirrten und bald nicht mehr in Worten ausdrücken ließen. Die Überlegungen blieben auf halbem Wege stecken und füllten seinen Kopf mit einem unklärbaren Gemisch merkwürdiger, ihn selbst beunruhigender Bruchstücke. (p.20)

After his release, Dallow decides that there is nothing to be gained by remembering his time in prison, and consciously decides to forget this part of his life. Repression of the past and compromise with the present are, as Dallow knows, the two social skills necessary in order to survive and progress in such a society. He is unable to comprehend his guilt, and consequently does not regard his time in prison as a punishment, but rather as an insult and an irreclaimable waste of time:

Und nun war er frei, und der einzige Entschluß, der ihm klar und einleuchtend erschien, war seine Entscheidung, die vergangenen Monate so rasch wie möglich zu vergessen. Er wollte nicht daran denken, und er wollte vor allem nicht darüber reden. Er wollte die Zeit aus seinem Gedächtnis löschen, um sich von ihr zu befreien. Die Inhaftierung hatte er nie als Strafe empfinden können, sondern allein als eine Kränkung und einen nicht wiedergutzumachenden Verlust von Zeit. (pp.20-21)

In spite of his intentions to the contrary, Dallow quickly comes to realise that he cannot simply forget his past, if only for the fact that he is constantly confronted by the evidence of his lost time. Indeed, all aspects of his former life which defined him as a person have changed dramatically: his wife has left him, he has lost his job and his lover has deserted him for his nearest rival. On returning to his home he is confronted by the evidence of his lengthy absence, by piles of unopened mail, dust and a wardrobe of clothes which are no longer fashionable. Of all his dearest possessions, only his car appears to have withstood the perils of time. He finds inspiration in this machine, which does not allow the past and the passage of time to affect its function:

Auf der Heimfahrt freute ihn der gleichmäßig laufende Motor seines Wagens. Die Maschine hatte die beiden Jahre der unfreiwilligen Ruhestellung unbeschadet überstanden. Sie arbeitete störungsfrei und zuverlässig. Beispielhaft, dachte Dallow, ich sollte mir mein Auto zum Vorbild nehmen. (p.21)

Dallow recognises the advantages of being able to function like an automaton, unaffected by emotional responses to the past, but proves incapable of doing so himself, particularly when he learns that the law under which he was sentenced has since been amended, and that the action for which he was imprisoned would now go



virtually unpunished. Dallow learns this in the course of his conversation with Roessler on his return to the institute. Roessler concedes that the action taken by the authorities against him was extreme, but also sees it in the context of the political climate at the time. Dallow is therefore a victim of historical circumstances. Society, in Roessler's view, has progressed since the time of Dallow's arrest:

'[...] Es war eine dumme Geschichte, und das habe ich auch, wie du weißt, dem Gericht gesagt. Das Ganze war nicht gerade genial von dir, aber es war eine unnötige Überreaktion, dich deshalb ins Gefängnis zu bringen. Die Zeit war damals hektisch, überall witterte man Feinde und reagierte hysterisch. Heute würde man es anders sehen. Man würde dir eine Rüge aussprechen, das wäre alles. Wir sind ein Stück weitergekommen. Aber damals, na, das weißt du selbst.' (pp.36-37)

His advice to Dallow is to try to forget the whole affair, and to concentrate on the future. Roessler also knows the importance of being able to repress the past in order to survive in the present:

'[...] Vergiß die dumme Geschichte. Natürlich wird das für dich nicht leicht sein, aber es wäre die beste Grundlage, einen völlig neuen Anfang zu machen. Vergiß, was passierte, orientiere dich auf deine Zukunft.' (p.37)

The advice which Roessler offers Dallow is something which is repeated often in relation to Dallow's past. Indeed, his original intention was to do precisely as Roessler suggests. On his release from prison he takes no interest in the town in which he has been a reluctant guest for nineteen months. He makes his way to the train station without so much as a backward glance. On his return to Leipzig, Dallow is confused by his situation. In spite of the familiarity of his physical surroundings, he feels increasingly alienated from the world around him. Time has been suspended for him during the months of prison. Society has moved on without him. He is reminded in his meeting with Roessler of the cliché that there is no future without the past. The phrase is one which he himself had often used during lectures and seminars at the institute, the real meaning of which only now, as a result of his own experience, becomes apparent to him:

'Ohne Vergangenheit gibt es keine Zukunft', sagte er laut. Und dann lächelte er, weil er sich erinnerte, diesen Satz schon mehrfach in seinen Vorlesungen und Seminaren gesagt zu haben, damals, in jener Vergangenheit, die hinter seiner Vergangenheit lag. Er hatte diesen Satz stets mit dem dafür notwendigen Pathos gebraucht, aber sein eigentlicher Sinn ging ihm erst jetzt auf. (p.38)

The feeling of detachment from the rest of society is augmented by the impossibility of his return to his former life. Having learned of the decriminalisation of the act for which he was sent to prison, Dallow also feels vindicated in his decision to refuse to conform to the moral and ethical codes of society and attempt to find a job. His avoidance of responsibility in his relationships with others, and in particular in his womanising, is in many respects a direct consequence of his detachment from the rest of society. Volker Hage has interpreted Dallow's string of visits to dance bars and brief, sexual encounters with women as evidence of the Western, sexual revolution of the late 1960's spreading across the border into the socialist German state, using this as further evidence of the historical context of the story.<sup>5</sup> If this is the case, as Hage argues, then it is also evidence of the limitations of the spread of sexual freedom and libertine values in the GDR, for ultimately none of the characters are content with this state of affairs, using the changed, social climate to their own advantage in their search for domestic security.

The most significant aspect of Dallow's alienation is his refusal to look for work. After his release from prison, he opts to live from his savings until such time as he has decided how to rebuild his life. He calculates that, given moderate expenses, he will be able to survive for a year on the money he has saved. Yet Dallow's refusal to find himself another job offends the strong work ethic of GDR society. Almost immediately after his release from prison, he finds himself under pressure to resume work. He is contacted by two officers from the secret police, Müller and Schulze, and offered assistance in exchange for certain information. Dallow is assured that, if he so wishes, he can recommence work at the institute the following Monday.

This initial encounter with the secret police reveals a great deal about the mechanics of the state and its involvement in every aspect of life, as well as the importance attached to work as a cohesive element in social integration. Work is inextricably linked to a common, shared identity with the state in the socialist system. A later meeting with Müller and Schulze confirms this. At this point, Dallow has been out of

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<sup>5</sup> Volker Hage, 'Freiheit, mir graut's vor dir. Über die DDR im Jahre 1968 - und heute: Christoph Heins Roman "Der Tangospieler"', *Die Zeit*, March 1988, p.1.

work for some three months. A mid-morning call at his apartment finds Dallow still in bed. His persistence in avoiding work is criticised by Schulze:

‘Sie sind seit einem Vierteljahr aus dem Strafvollzug entlassen, Herr Dr. Dallow’, sagte er schließlich. ‘Wollen Sie nicht eine Arbeit aufnehmen? Das ist nicht Ihre Privatangelegenheit, lieber Herr Dr. Dallow. Wie Sie wissen, verstoßen Sie damit gegen Moral und Normen unseres gesellschaftlichen Lebens. Es gibt dafür sehr häßliche Worte.’

‘Arbeitsscheu? Asozial?’ erkundigte sich Dallow zuvorkommend.

Schulze nickte und sagte: ‘Ich biete Ihnen nochmals unsere Hilfe an.’ (p.149)

The connection between labour and the socialist state is self evident, taking Marxist historical analysis as its ideological basis and the justification for its existence. Dallow's attitude in avoiding work is described by Schulze as an offence against the morals and customs of GDR society. His behaviour in the eyes of the state is reminiscent of the decadence of bourgeois capitalism, and has no place in a society where labour is, in theory at least, the honourable duty of every citizen. Indeed, the newly adopted constitution makes this a point of law. Article 24 states:

Gesellschaftlich nützliche Tätigkeit ist eine ehrenvolle Pflicht für jeden arbeitsfähigen Bürger. Das Recht auf Arbeit und die Pflicht zur Arbeit bilden eine Einheit.<sup>6</sup>

The importance of labour is shown from another angle by the attitude of Dallow's parents to the news that he has no job. The reaction of an older generation shows the importance of labour in a broader historical context, linking it to the Protestant work ethic of the past. Dallow knows he is unable to explain to his parents why he has not worked in the three weeks since his release from prison. For Dallow's father, a farmer, work forms an essential part of personal identity and self respect. He finds it impossible to give a truthful answer to his mother's question, for he feels neither parent would be capable of understanding his predicament. Indeed, the news that he had decided to avoid work would, to Dallow's mind, represent a more bitter blow to his parents than the news of his arrest. He resorts to lies in order not to hurt the feelings of his parents, but is forced to refuse when his father asks him to return to work on the farm. He finds himself trapped, unable on the one hand to look to the future as a member of a society from which he feels outcast and alienated, and yet

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<sup>6</sup> Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom 6. April 1968 (GBI.IS.199), quoted from Rüdiger Thomas, *Modell DDR. Die Kalkulierte Emanzipation* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1972), pp.148-161 (p.152).

incapable of returning to the past. He has outgrown his family background, and feels cut off from his roots:

‘Ich bin kein Bauer’, erwiderte Dallow gequält.

Der Alte schüttelte den Kopf. ‘Das wird sich finden. Hier hast du Arbeit. Hier gehört dir ein Hof. Und das halbe Haus auch. Und wenn du nicht hier wohnen willst, bauen wir an. Oder wir kaufen dir den leerstehenden Ausbau.’

Dallow schüttelte unentwegt den Kopf. Er schloß die Augen, bevor er sagte: ‘Es ist zu spät, Vater. Jetzt gehöre ich nicht mehr hierher.’ (pp.80-81)

Dallow rejects work in protest against the way he has been treated by society, particularly in view of the changed legal position with regard to the offence he committed, which he takes as his justification for his refusal to conform. A second performance of the cabaret, to which both Dr. Berger, the judge at Dallow’s trial, and his lawyer, Kiewer, are invited, prompts Dr. Berger to contest Dallow’s claim of innocence in the light of the developments in the legal system. According to Dr. Berger, the legal system, like society itself, is in a constant state of development. It is nevertheless impossible to change what has already passed in time, as this remains relative to that time and morally independent of future development:

‘Ihnen ist kein Unrecht widerfahren, wie Sie wohl jetzt vermuten. Die heutige Aufführung offenbart kein an Ihnen begangenes Unrecht. Das Recht ist etwas Lebendiges und entwickelt sich. Wie die Gesellschaft. Aus Unrecht kann niemals Recht werden. Unrecht bleibt immer Unrecht, doch alles ist im Fluß, und man kann nicht zweimal in das gleiche Wasser steigen. Ihnen ist damals kein Unrecht widerfahren, mein lieber Herr Dr. Dallow. Und der heutige, übrigens wirklich amüsante Abend besagt nur, daß wir ein anderes Jahr schreiben. Der Fluß fließt, das werden Sie doch verstehen.’ (p.133)

Dr. Berger argues from a similar standpoint to that of Kruschkatz in the novel *Horns Ende* when explaining the verdict of the enquiry into Horn’s work in Leipzig in the early 1950’s, as a result of which Horn was stripped of his title of Doctor, expelled from the Party and demoted. Whereas Kruschkatz at least recognises that Horn was the victim of injustice carried out in the name of historical expediency, however, Dr. Berger does not consider Dallow’s case to be a miscarriage of justice. The ethical concept of right and wrong has no absolute standards for Dr. Berger, and relates only to the law as it stands at a particular point in history. In effect, Dr. Berger’s argument follows the same lines as the historicist approach to the analysis of the past, which Walter Benjamin criticises in the seventh proposition of his theses on history as



‘Einfühlung in den Sieger’.<sup>7</sup> Here, Benjamin takes issue with the histories of the 19th century French historian, N.D. Fustel de Coulanges, and the approach to history which works from the premise that, in order to understand the past, it is necessary to forget the knowledge which has been acquired since. Such an approach to history, Benjamin argues, favours the ruling class at any given moment in time, through whose accounts, and from whose point of view, the knowledge of this past is handed down. It is against this form of historical understanding, according to Benjamin, that the Historical Materialist must direct his work.

Dr. Berger claims it is impossible to change what has happened in the past, and that injustice cannot be transformed into justice. However, he denies that Dallow is the victim of injustice, having been tried in accordance with the law as it stood at the time. It is impossible, according to Dr. Berger, to judge the past from the moral standpoint of the present, and the fact that the act in the cabaret for which Dallow was imprisoned can now be performed without such repercussions is merely a sign of social development and progress. Dallow’s attempt to seek vindication for the sentence which was passed against him also overlooks the fact that, prior to this he was a willing and compliant beneficiary of the privileges which society offered him. It reveals the hypocrisy of his own position, insofar as he was previously content to accept the law as long as this was to his advantage.

The paradoxes and contradictions of both arguments serve to demonstrate the way in which expediency in the name of history has given way to self-serving dogmatism. Dr. Berger tries to justify this in the name of progress, however, there is no indication in the text that progress has been achieved. Indeed, the actual historical context of *Der Tangospieler* demonstrates quite the contrary. The understanding of history in ideological terms appears to have come to an impasse.

The paradoxes which surround Dallow’s motivation to prove his innocence are at the centre of the problems which concern his characterisation. These contradictions become an irritation to the reader which the narrative stance only serves to increase. Both Volker Hage and Agnes Hübner choose to regard the irritation of the reader with

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Über den Begriff der Geschichte’, p.696.

the character Dallow as a deliberate ploy of the author.<sup>8</sup> Whilst it can be argued that none of the main protagonists of Hein's fiction are portrayed in such a way as to make them wholly endearing to the reader, the irritation with the character Dallow, as the discussion of the narrative structure of the text reveals, has sources other than authorial intent. Where Hein does create positive characters, these are mainly peripheral, and almost exclusively women. *Der Tangospieler* is no exception, the only counterbalance to the male egotism and self pity of Dallow appearing once again in the form of female characters.

Elke, with whom Dallow gradually enters into a more involved relationship after a chance meeting in a night-club, sees beyond his all-consuming self-obsession the real cause of his problem, namely the fear of responsibility. By contrast, responsibility is forced upon Elke both in her role as a woman and as a mother. She is not dependent upon men, preferring divorce from her husband to the prospect of a future spent working to feed him as well as their child. It is a measure of her own self respect that she allows Dallow the chance to decide after their first encounter whether or not they should meet again. Elke makes her feelings and opinions clear from the outset, creating the framework for the rules by which Dallow must abide if he wishes to become involved in her life. In every respect, her actions are governed by a sense of responsibility for her child and herself. Dallow's attraction to Elke is in part due to the manner in which she takes responsibility for her life. Her domestic environment offers security against his own anxiety and inability to take control of his life.

Dallow's decision under pressure to find a job as a lorry driver is seen by Elke as another way of avoiding taking responsibility for himself. He is unsuccessful, due to his over-qualification for such employment, however, this failure leads him to believe he is the victim of another social conspiracy. Elke regards his attitude as spiteful and childish, reminding him that there are a number of other jobs he could find if he wished to do so. She, however, is obliged to take responsibility for her life on account of her role as a mother:

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<sup>8</sup> Agnes Hüfner, 'Immer so weitermachen. Christoph Heins Roman "Der Tangospieler"', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 11/12 March 1989, p.4.

Dallow's difficulty in taking responsibility for his own life can also be seen in the broader, socio-political context of the GDR. In this context, Dallow is the product of a system in which every sphere of social activity is regulated by the state, including the ultimate responsibility of political decision-making. The individual is prevented from taking responsibility for decision-making, and dialogue between the individual and the state is substituted by a relationship which is based instead on the fulfilment of duties, which are embodied in the constitution of the state. There exists no collective counterbalance to the monopoly of state control. Instead, the concept of reciprocal responsibility between the individual and the state is transformed into a situation where fear of state authority becomes the guiding principle of the relationship between the two. Fear of punishment becomes a substitute for responsibility. The railwayman from the village station where Dallow's parents live draws attention to the nature of the relationship between the individual and the state in reference to his own job: 'Und in meinem Beruf [...] steht man mit einem Bein auch immer im Zuchthaus. Ein vergessenes Signal, und du wanderst ab.' (p.79) A similar point is made by Dallow's brother-in-law when he talks about a previous job as an ambulance driver:

'Es war schwere Arbeit. Führen wir zu schnell, wurden wir bestraft, waren wir zu langsam und der Patient starb, waren wir auch dran. Wir standen immer mit einem Bein im Zuchthaus.' (p.84)

Dallow makes the point that the entire country must be living with one foot in prison, with the exception of convicts and prison officers, a somewhat cynical description of an otherwise accurate assessment of the overbearing influence of the state. The presence of state authority is felt in every area of life, from police spot checks on citizens' property to offers of assistance in the search for work by members of the secret police in exchange for information. Within the text, an oppressive atmosphere of surveillance is created which extends beyond the 'surveying' effect of the camera technique of the third person narrator. The authoritarian character of the state reveals similarities between the past and the present which further demonstrate the author's concern with the subject matter of history. The relationship between the individual and the state shows parallels between the authoritarianism of Prussian absolutism, National Socialism and GDR socialism. There are also significant differences, however, notably the guarantees made by the GDR state to the individual with regard to labour and social welfare. This again is apparent in the text, showing Hein's

concern not only with the similarities between the past and the present, but also the differences between them.

The representation of state authority in *Der Tangospieler* shows no commitment to ideological principles, as the judge Dr. Berger would have Dallow believe is the case with respect to the law, showing it instead as reactive, random and arbitrary. Nowhere is this more in evidence than in the revelation of the actual historical background of the text, culminating in the invasion of Czechoslovakia by armies of the Warsaw Pact countries, including the GDR. As Hein himself has commented, this act demonstrates the moral bankruptcy of the SED as the guardian of the state. The participation of troops from the GDR is even a direct contravention of article 8, section 1 of the newly adopted constitution, in which it is written:

Die allgemein anerkannten, dem Frieden und der friedlichen Zusammenarbeit der Völker dienenden Regeln des Völkerrechts sind für die Staatsmacht und jeden Bürger verbindlich. Die Deutsche Demokratische Republik wird niemals einen Eroberungskrieg unternehmen oder ihre Streitkräfte gegen die Freiheit eines anderen Volkes einsetzen.<sup>9</sup>

Dallow takes no interest in the events in Prague. He considers politics to be the concern of the state, which, as a consequence of his own self-absorption and personal protest, is of no importance to him. His only reaction, having chanced upon a newspaper article dealing with events in Prague and Warsaw, is to take it upon himself to order a daily paper, as a source of entertainment and a means of killing time. Later, on the occasion of a birthday party held by a friend of Elke's, the conversation at the table turns to events in Prague. Again Dallow claims to have no interest in the matter:

Man sprach über Prag, über das Treffen der sowjetischen Militärs mit Dubcek und Cernik und über den Tod von Masaryk, über den in den letzten Tagen Spekulationen in den Zeitungen der Tschechoslowakei zu finden waren, die von der sowjetischen Presse jedoch empört zurückgewiesen wurden. Einer der Männer erkundigte sich nach Dallows Ansichten und fragte, ob er Dubcek Chancen einräume, politisch zu überleben.

‘Ich habe keine Ahnung’, antwortete ihm Dallow, ‘und es interessiert mich auch nicht.’

Er sagte es freundlich und betont lebenswürdig, aber das Gespräch verstummte, und alle sahen zu ihm.

‘Das kann nicht Ihr Ernst sein’, sagte der Mann, der ihn angesprochen hatte. ‘In diesem Fall wären Sie der einzige Mensch in diesem Land, den die Ereignisse in Prag nicht beschäftigen. So oder so ist doch da jeder engagiert.’

Dallow zuckte bedauernd mit den Schultern und erwiderte nichts. (pp.158-159)

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<sup>9</sup> Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik quoted from Rüdiger Thomas, p.149.



Eventually, Dallow's preoccupation with himself drives him to a foolish act, the potential repercussions of which force him to comply with the demands of authority. One evening, Dallow follows and then accosts Dr. Berger, demanding to know from him why he was sentenced in the name of the people when it was Dr. Berger's interpretation of the law which resulted in his prison sentence. His frustration at the hopelessness of his situation overcomes him, and he attempts to strangle Dr. Berger. Under the serious threat of renewed legal action against him, Dallow is now obliged to capitulate to Dr. Berger's wishes, to find himself a job and to enter once more into normal society. Still unwilling to relinquish what he considers to be a position of greater moral authority, Dallow, with the help of his friend Harry, finds a seasonal job as a waiter on the Baltic island of Hiddensee.

His return to work, coupled with the physical remoteness of the island has a calming effect on Dallow. Enjoying the tranquillity of the island, he begins to forget his problems in Leipzig. He reflects on the words of the pipe fitter during their chance encounter one evening in a bar. From his new vantage point, the pipe fitter's philosophy, that the straight path is a labyrinth, appears extreme:

Er beobachtete die seltenen Vögel und registrierte mit gleicher Teilnahmslosigkeit die wechselnden Farben des Himmels und ihre Entsprechungen auf dem spiegelnden Wasser, und mit der langsam spürbar werdenden Ermüdung erfüllte ihn ein Gefühl alles erfassender Gleichgültigkeit. Fasziniert betrachtete er die Windflüchter, jene vom Wind bizarr verformten Bäume. Dallow erschienen sie wie Gewächse, die ihren ständigen Demütigungen erlegen waren und eine ihn anrührende Form gefunden hatten, mit ihrer Bedrückung zu leben. Der gerade Weg ist das Labyrinth, erinnerte er sich und lächelte. Das Wort erschien ihm zu angestrengt und unangemessen aufwendig. Er sah auf das Wasser hinaus und dachte, daß alles sehr viel einfacher sei. (p.192)

During his time on the island, Dallow is confronted by actual political events when, one morning, he hears the news on the radio of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. His companion for the night, a young student, is moved to tears and wants to return immediately to Berlin to meet with her friends. She is also astounded that Dallow can remain so disinterested by the news. The response of the young girl to the news of the invasion, her shock and the spontaneous reaction to return to Berlin to meet with her friends, is one of the few, hopeful images to appear in the text. Unlike Dallow, she is not yet tainted by cynicism. By contrast, Dallow's only reaction to her tears finds its expression in sexual desire.

Dallow's eventual escape from his labyrinth and return to the straight path of his former life occurs as the result of another accident. In this instance, it is Roessler, Dallow's former colleague and adversary, who is the unwitting victim of events. Unaware of the news of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Roessler denounces in a lecture reports in the western media of an invasion, taking the official line of argument by reiterating the constitutional obligations of the armed forces of the GDR, and relying on outdated newspaper reports in his defence of the former policy of the state:

Daraufhin erklärte Roessler, die Meldungen über einen Einmarsch in Prag seien nichts als eine erneute westliche Provokation, schloß militärische Maßnahmen gegen die befreundete Tschechoslowakei kategorisch aus und berief sich dabei auf ältere Zeitungsmeldungen und Kommentare von Staat und Partei. Die Unglaubwürdigkeit der westlichen Nachrichten zeige sich, wie Roessler länger ausführte, an der Meldung, daß auch Truppen der DDR in das Nachbarland einmarschiert seien. Diese Meldung empfinde er, wie Roessler den Studenten sagte, als besonders widerlich und empörend, da aus politischer und geschichtlicher Verantwortung niemals deutsche Soldaten an einem Einmarsch in Prag teilnehmen könnten. (p.202)

As in Dallow's case, Roessler's mistake costs him his job, and in a rather ironic conclusion, the beneficiary of Roessler's mistake is Dallow himself. A telephone call from Barbara Schleider informs Dallow of changes at the institute, and a visit from Sylvia confirms the offer of a post as lecturer, should Dallow be willing to accept. Dallow shows no hesitation in agreeing to return. All his demands are satisfied by this offer of promotion, which he regards as capitulation by the state in respect of his imprisonment, and proof of his innocence. In an instant, Dallow has forgotten the past and is reconciled with the present. His reintegration into society is met not with reluctance and resignation, but with relief.

The conclusion to *Der Tangospieler* sees Dallow's rehabilitation and his fortunate escape from his personal prison. The army convoy upon which he chances on his return to Leipzig, and the sight of a tired, young soldier causes him momentarily to imagine himself being crushed to death in his car as one of the tanks advances upon him, out of control. The dream reminds Dallow how close he came to being crushed by the machinery of state in the futile struggle to prove his innocence. He realises that society has given him another chance, and has demonstrated its faith in his value as a citizen. If Dallow has learned anything at all from his ordeal, then it is only that in future he must be more careful in what he says and what he does. In the end, the state is the inevitable victor, having succeeded in bullying Dallow into conformity with his

final consent. 'Er hat Pech gehabt' (p.202), is how Sylvia describes Roessler's fall from grace. As a historian, he became a victim of history himself. The final image of Dallow at the piano in his apartment, playing Chopin whilst pictures from the television show women with children on their arms throwing flowers to the soldiers of the invading armies in Czechoslovakia, demonstrates the glaring contradictions which have arisen between the ideological premises of historical understanding in the GDR and the political actions of the state. Meanwhile, untroubled by the lies and hypocrisy of the state which the invasion of Czechoslovakia brings to light, and content once more to return to his former occupation, Dallow checks his alarm clock to make certain he arrives early for work the following day.

*Der Tangospieler* develops familiar themes from Hein's earlier works, in particular the role of the historian in relation to the state, presenting them in a different light and in the context of a different period in GDR history. It represents an important addition to Hein's chronicles of GDR history, revealing the attitudes and methods of state control which induced conformity under everyday Stalinism. At the same time, it challenges the ideological basis for the understanding of history, showing the collapse of ideology in the course of political practice. Hein's chronicle of the GDR in the 1960s bridges the gap between the portrayal of society in *Horns Ende* and *Drachenblut*, building a picture of the development of GDR society and the problems inherent within it.

## Conclusion

Through his reading and interpretation of the historical philosophy of Walter Benjamin, Christoph Hein develops a role for himself as an author through which he attempts to reconsider the history of the society in which he, as a first generation citizen, was brought up and for which, in spite of many misgivings, his sympathies remained. By defining his role as an author as that of a chronicler through the medium of literature, he aims to distance himself from the role of the author in the service of the state, and create an intellectual vantage point for himself from which to observe and record the past. Hein's aim is not merely to create a new aesthetic for the production of literature in a totalitarian state, however. His concerns are also directed at the nature of historical writing and the idea of progress through history, which characterised the production of historical writing in the GDR, and as a counter to which his literary texts and essays, which have been examined in this study, bear witness. The affinities between the GDR author Hein and the philosopher Walter Benjamin are in this context of considerable importance. Benjamin's critique of the concept of progress in history, which defined the political philosophy of the German Social Democratic Party during the early part of the 20th century and which later impregnated GDR Marxist-Leninism, acquires the character of a *leitmotif* for Hein's texts. Indeed, Hein's experience of GDR society and the illusory nature of its utopian determinism finds its own historical correspondence with Benjamin's era and the rise of Stalinism and fascism.

Hein's literary chronicles are a fictional account of daily life in the GDR set against the actual, historical development of Real Socialism from the 1950's through to the 1980's. Although the historical context remains for the most part in the background of the texts, revealing itself only indirectly in the mundane dramas of the fictional characters, it functions in combination with the narrative to present a picture of GDR society which stands in stark opposition to the historical model with which it is meant to comply. The novel *Horns Ende* portrays a society in a state of transition, where patterns of thought and behaviour associated with the recent German past, through a form of socialisation which can trace its origin to the politics of bourgeois democracy and fascism, transcend the artificial divide which marks the transition from fascism to Real Socialism. The trace of the past reveals itself once more in the institutions of the



present. The novel describes a society which is both insecure with regard to its status in the present and simultaneously determined to eradicate the dialectic conflict between itself and the recent past in order to secure its position for the future. In its insecurity, however, it allows structures from the past to be incorporated in the present in its attempt to create a social framework upon which new institutions can be developed. The result is the continuity of the past, in the form of ideas and patterns of behaviour, concealed within the framework of the new.

*Der Tangospieler* reveals the cynicism which emerges as a result of the historical expediency which characterises the transition from National Socialism to GDR socialism. Through the experiences of the main character, Hans-Peter Dallow, Hein presents a society in which ideology is used and exploited as a pre-requisite for survival. At all levels, from the individual to the state itself, the ethical and moral dimension inherent in idealism is substituted by a cynical and self-serving political pragmatism. The boundaries between idealism and dogmatism become blurred. The death knell of idealism and the historical backdrop to *Der Tangospieler* is the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 by armies from the Warsaw Pact countries, including troops from the GDR.

The cynicism which characterises *Der Tangospieler* finds its ultimate manifestation in the novella *Drachenblut*. Set in the early 1980's, the novella portrays GDR society as a world of alienation and desperation. Claudia's narrative represents a bleak commentary on life in the GDR, a landscape littered by disillusionment, escapism and repression. Her narrative is itself a narrative of repression, where that which remains unstated represents a more significant commentary on the present than the contrived attempt at self-justification. Once again, the novella exposes the origin of repression and alienation as a consequence of GDR socialisation and the political dogmatism which accompanied it. The historical backdrop to Claudia's socialisation is the forceful repression of the workers' revolt in 1953, symbolised by the appearance of the tank in the main square of 'G'.

Forceful repression is not only symbolic of the crushing of individual aspiration and submission to the will of the state. It is a theme which appears often in Hein's prose fiction, and represents in addition the absence of a dialectic confrontation with the

contradictions which arise as a result of the re-emergence of the past in the present. The victims of this forceful oppression are also the historians of Hein's texts. Trapped between their duty to the authoritarian state and the demands placed upon them in its service, and their duty to history and their profession, they are either forced to conform to ideological dogma and represent history as the proof of a determinist, theoretical model, or remain loyal to their responsibility to impartially record the past in accordance with their duties as chroniclers of history. As Hein wrote in his critique of Benjamin's *Kunstwerkaufsatz*, by remaining true to their convictions, their fate will be that the text remains unread.

In the case of Hein's historians, their fate is often worse. The dilemma of the historian is summarised by the ailing Racine in 'Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois'. Does he remain loyal to his responsibilities as an historian and record the atrocities committed by the French soldiers in their campaign in the Netherlands, or does he remain silent in order to protect himself from the retribution of the Absolutist state and by so doing abandon the victims of history to the whims of fate? Racine makes the compromise in favour of his own salvation, but not without cost to his own well-being. Horn, by contrast, refuses to compromise his duty as an historian and suffers the retribution which leads him eventually to suicide.

Even through compromise, the historian is not free from the wilful machinations of the state, as Dallow finds to his cost when he inadvertently plays the accompaniment on the piano to a song which makes fun of Walter Ulbricht at a student cabaret. Dallow is ultimately reinstated at the institute where he formerly worked, as arbitrary circumstances once more prevail, this time in his favour, to undermine his predecessor.

In his essays and interviews, Hein has repeatedly drawn attention to the absence of dialectic thought and analysis with regard to the writing of history in the GDR. He argues against the idea that history is a closed text, to which the conclusion is the resolution of dialectic antagonisms as perceived in the utopian vision of communism. Rather, society must learn, and GDR society in particular, to recognise and confront the contradictions which form an inherent part of any political system, and use them for the benefit of social advancement:

Unsere Gesellschaft hatte und hat einige Schwierigkeiten, mit Widersprüchen zu leben, sie zu akzeptieren. Gewöhnlich werden allenfalls nichtantagonistische Widersprüche anerkannt, also jene, die sich allein unter dem Teppich kehren, wenn man sie nur betrachtet. In den letzten zehn Jahren aber hat selbst die Philosophie bemerkt, was dem Volk aus praktischer Anschauung immer bekannt war: Auch die sozialistische Gesellschaft hat wie jede Gesellschaft ihre unlösbaren Widersprüche, die mit der Gesellschaftsform untrennbar verbunden sind und die nur mit der Veränderung der Gesellschaft aufhebbar sind. Wir haben zu lernen, mit ihnen umzugehen, ihre Bewegungen auszuhalten, und mehr noch: diese teilweise schmerzlichen Widersprüche im Interesse der Entwicklung unserer Gesellschaft zu nutzen.<sup>1</sup>

Hein develops the concept of the writer as a chronicler, who collects and compiles his work from his experience of GDR society and lays down the contradictions as they appear. As opposed to the writer who is constrained by given political and literary models, the chronicler will always be prepared to take up and incorporate the contradictions of life in his accounts. It is the virtue of the concept of the chronicler as developed from Benjamin's writings which has enabled Hein to make a profound, refreshing and enlightening contribution to literature as well as the perception of history in the GDR.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Die Zensur ist überlebt, nutzlos, paradox, menschenfeindlich, volksfeindlich, ungesetzlich und strafbar', p.93.

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